Formative? Informative? Neither?

Towards understanding of the practice of proclamation, the core element of Russian Baptist Worship.

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Timofey Cheprasov

University of Wales

International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague

June 2015

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently being submitted in candidature for any degree.

Candidate Date June 15, 2015

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis if accepted to be available for photocopying and for interlibrary loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Contents

Abstract vi

Acknowledgements vii

Abbreviations viii

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1. Preaching as retelling the story: the beginning of the Russian baptistic movement 12

Introduction 12

1.1 Socio-political and religious situation in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century 15

Freedom 15

The crisis 20

The Bible 22

1.2 The Stundist dissent: a case study 23

Conclusion 29

CHAPTER 2. Understanding the context: theological nest of the Russian Orthodox Church ... 30

Introduction 30

2.1 Theosis: the way… 32

2.2 … walked together with others (Sobornost) 36

2.3 Preaching in the Russian Orthodox Church 41

Conclusion 46

CHAPTER 3. Development of Russian Baptist preaching in the 19th and 20th centuries 47

Introduction 47

3.1 Formative years 50

3.2 Biblical interpretation 58

Baptists 58

Evangelical Christians 60

3.3 Big dreams and dashed hopes: 1905-1929 65

The Christian printed media 68

Christian education 72

3.4 Trials and tribulations: living in a spiritual desert, 1929-1987 81
Atheistic academia vs. baptistic spirituality 83
Conclusion 88

CHAPTER 4. Preaching and *Bratskii Vestnik* 90

Introduction 90
4.1 Biblical exegesis in post-war communities 90
4.2 *Bratskii Vestnik* on preaching 94
Conclusion 109

CHAPTER 5. Preaching in contemporary Russian Baptist churches. 111

Introduction 111
5.1 The context of worship 112
The house of prayer 112
Worship pattern 113
Participants 116
The ministers of the Word and the problem of authority 118
5.2 Contemporary understanding of preaching 123
Conclusion 131

CHAPTER 6. The need for a vision: defining baptistic identity 133

Introduction 133
6.1 Various ways to define Baptist identity 136
6.2 A story of the *Dobrovolets* [Volunteer] community 144
A peculiar way to read the Scripture 149
6.3 The *baptist vision* and the theological method of James Wm. McClendon Jr. 150
Biography as theology 152
The baptist vision 158
Conclusion 163

CHAPTER 7. Practices: 'actualizing resources' of the vision 165

Introduction 165
7.1 Social practices 168
7.2 Christ and power 175
Powerful practices 180

Preaching as a powerful practice 184
Conclusion 188

CHAPTER 8. Reading the Bible in community 189

Introduction 189
8.1 The question of communal hermeneutics 190
8.2 Practices of reading the Bible 206
Conclusion 214

CHAPTER 9. Preaching, Church, and University 216

Introduction 216
9.1 Three sermons in a worship service: present, past and future 219
9.2 Preaching in educational space 224
Church and University in paradox 224
The discipline of homiletics 230
From conflict to partnership: the way to mutual understanding 234
Conclusion 237

CONCLUSION 240

Bibliography 248

Books and monographs 248
Articles in magazines, newspapers and electronic sources 267
Dissertations, thesis, and unpublished papers 275
Personal interviews, letters 277

Appendix 1 278

Abstract

The aim of this research is to consider the communities that belong to the movement of the Evangelical Christians – Baptists in Russia. In recent years, this religious group has attracted a significant amount of interest from the academic community. However, the focus of the majority of the research projects has been centred around the history of the Baptist movement in Russia, rather than its contemporary ecclesial realities. This thesis concentrates on the practice of proclamation in today's Baptist churches. I have attempted to identify the various convictions of these churches, which are related to the way preaching is practiced and understood.

An analysis of the historical development of preaching and various external factors, that have influenced Baptist communities as well as their practices, have highlighted the need to approach preaching as a social practice. It must be recognised that as a practice, preaching has the potential to 'fall,' thus underlining its formative, as well as destructive potential, for the Baptist identity.

A particular understanding of the theological centre of Baptist identity - as a hermeneutical principle, when the reading community sees itself inherently present in the biblical narrative, but at the same time is examined and transformed by it, indicates that a solution to the damaging potential of the practice of proclamation must be seen in the renewed emphasis on the communal hermeneutics, thus placing preaching into a cluster of practices of reading the Bible within a community.

This thesis does not aim to offer any instant fixes to the current situation in Russian Baptist communities. Instead, I suggest turning to the educational institutions, which are involved in the process of ministerial formation, in order to stimulate further dialogue and reflection on the nature of preaching and hermeneutics, taking into consideration its cultural and theological peculiarities.

Acknowledgements

As I finish writing the last remaining pages of my thesis, and look back over the past nine years, I start realising the number of people that have contributed to the completion of this work. I want to express deep gratitude to everyone who has assisted me, through their advice, challenging questions, recommendations, and through their encouragement and inspiration.

First of all, I would like to say 'thank you' to the community of International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague (IBTS). Every research colloquium was a massive inspiration for me. I am very grateful to all the tutors and students for their input into my project. However, I have to add that being part of IBTS residential community in Prague has deeply affected the way I understood both academic work and Christian ministry, and I feel privileged to have had this experience.

I would like to express special gratitude to my supervisory team, David Brown, Keith Jones and Parush Parushev. These people have introduced me to theological studies and academic research. They have encouraged me to take on this project. This work would have never been completed without their priceless advice, guidance in my research, and encouragement.

I greatly appreciate the support of Bury Baptist Church, our church family over the past four years, who allowed me to have ample time to finish this thesis. And I particularly want to thank Fiona McEwan for her careful proof-reading of my writings.

I am thankful to my parents, for their assistance and encouragement, and to my sons, Alexey and Daniel, who have patiently waited for their father to 'finish his book without pictures.' And last, but not least, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Yulia. Her encouragement, inspiration, and patience are impossible to overestimate.

Abbreviations

ARUEC – All-Russia Union of Evangelical Christians

AUCECB / VSEKHB – the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians – Baptists

(in Russian – Vsesoyuznii Sovet Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov)

BCC – Bible Correspondence Courses

BV – Bratskii Vestnik ["The Herald of the Brotherhood"]

BWA – Baptist World Alliance

CCECB – Council of Churches of EvangelicalChristians-Baptists

CECB – The Congress of Evangelical Christians - Baptists

EBF – European Baptist Federation

ECB – Evangelical Christians – Baptists

GULAG – Glavnoie Upravleniie Lagerei [Main Camp Administration]

IBTS – International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague

MTSECB - Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians – Baptists

NEP – New Economic Policy

RCCEF – Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith

RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

RUECB – the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

TCMII – Training Christians for Ministry (TCM) International Institute (USA, Austria)

USSR – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Translation

Whenever Russian sources are quoted, all the translation work from Russian into English is done by me, unless specified otherwise.

The English language quotations of the Bible come from the New International Version. Russian Synodal version is used for all biblical quotations which are translated from Russian.

Transliteration

In this thesis I am using the established English spellings of common Russian names and terms, as found in common dictionaries. Other Cyrillic words are transliterated by the following system:

А – A	Ё – IE	Л – L	С – S	Ч – CH	Э – E
Б – B	Ж – ZH	М – M	Т – T	Ш – SH	Ю – IU
В – V	З – Z	Н – N	У – U	Щ – SHCH	Я –IA
Г – G	И – I	О – O	Ф – F	Ъ – ”	
Д – D	Й – I	П – P	Х – KH	Ы – Y	
Е – E	К – K	Р – R	Ц – TS	Ь – ’	

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches[1] in Russia have one very distinctive feature – the role of preaching in the worship service. An average Baptist in Russia hears at least three sermons in one service of between 20 and 40 minutes (which when multiplied by four services per week gives the approximate amount of preaching done and heard in the majority of Baptist churches). Time-wise, about three quarters of a two-hour service are devoted to preaching the Word. Therefore, for all who either grew up in a Russian Baptist church or visited it, at least occasionally, the question 'what is preaching?' will be answered quickly – it is the Word of God. Further, 'how does preaching happen?' – a member of the church comes up into the pulpit, reads a passage from the Bible and then shares his[2] thoughts on it.[3]

Similarly the question 'why preaching' is also easily answered in the above mentioned communities – proclamation of the Word of God produces faith in its listeners. Such a response is an allusion to Romans 10:17, which in the Russian Synodal Translation says, 'Faith is from hearing and hearing is from the Word of God.' Traditionally this is used

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[1] Throughout this work the phrases "Russian Baptists," "Russian Baptist churches," etc. are the references to the communities and believers that are part of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (RUECB), which is the largest Baptist union in the Russian Federation. The history of the Union is traced from 30 April 1884 from the congress in Novo-Vasilievka, in Crimea. (Sergey N. Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov Ukraini, Rossii, Belorussii (1867-1917) [The History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Ukraine, Russia, Belarus (1867-1917)]*, Vol.1, (St. Petersburg, Bibliia Dlya Vsekh, 1999), p 200.) At present the Union consists of 1750 churches with approximately 90,000 members (For more information see the websites of RUECB: www.Baptist.org.ru and the European Baptist Federation (EBF): www.ebf.org).

[2] Habitually, women are barred from preaching. However, in the past the official position of the Baptist Union allowed women to preach (e.g. *Bratskii Vestnik [The Herald of the Brotherhood] (BV)*, Vol. 3, 1945). Although there was no official statement prohibiting women from preaching ministry, at the present time the idea of female preachers is opposed, as generally understood to be against the teaching of the Bible. For more on women in ministry see Chapter 3. Also Lina Andronoviene addresses the subject of women in church ministry in *Involuntarily Free or Voluntarily Bound: Singleness in the Baptistic Communities of Post-communist Europe.* IBTS Occasional Publications Series, Vol. II (Prague, International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

[3] Although this description may seem rather simplistic, it accurately reflects the understanding of a large number of both members and visitors of Russian Baptist churches. For a more in-depth discussion of the issue of the definition of preaching see Chapter 4.

as a reference to preaching – the proclaimed Word of God.[4] Thus preaching, understood as the "Word of God," is seen as something very powerful for forming Christian convictions of the listeners, for making Christians more "Christlike," and ultimately, for making them better Baptists. The question that is never asked though is whether this assumption, of preaching possessing great formative power, is a correct one. Thus the lack of critical analysis of the role of preaching defines the main question for this research – to study whether the presupposition of Russian Baptists of preaching being a major driving force in forming Baptist identity is a correct one, thus concluding whether it rightly holds its position of high respect, and reverence.

Paradoxically, there is little work done specifically on Baptist preaching in Russia (neither by Baptists nor by anybody else). Therefore, the part of my research related to preaching would be based on personal observations, interviews, surveys, articles from Baptist magazines and newspapers and some secular publications produced in the Soviet time. The absence of written sources, however, does not imply that the subject of preaching was neglected. On the contrary, preaching always received a lot of attention. Yet due to the high view of this practice, with heavy emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the act of proclamation, most articles on preaching and preachers were focused primarily on the qualities of preachers and their preparation (particularly spiritual preparation) for the event of proclamation.[5] There was no attempt to engage in critical assessment and revision of what were actual convictions about preaching that both preachers and listeners held, how these convictions developed, and most importantly, whether preaching rightly held the central position among all other church activities. Furthermore, an attempt to perform such an assessment would be considered inappropriate, if not sinful by many Christians.[6]

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[4] In Russian Baptist churches preaching has something similar to a sacramental understanding. When preaching is referred to as "the Word of God," this means exactly that – preaching is not the word of a preacher. Somehow the "Word" and the preacher are disconnected from each other. People may disagree with a preacher (in their everyday life), they may dislike a preacher, but in most cases the same people will not dare to criticise the sermon proclaimed from the pulpit by this person. I develop these insights further in Chapter 4.

[5] For further study of the development of Russian Baptist approach to preaching see Chapter 3.

[6] Arguably, such an attitude to critical analysis of the key church practices is part of the Orthodox heritage. See Chapter 2 for a review of the Orthodox context and its influence on Russian Baptists.

Similarly, little help can be received from books and articles published in the English-speaking world. Unlike a few aspects of Russian Baptist ecclesiology that did draw some research interest, such as charity work, spirituality, and history, preaching, despite its obvious importance for the life of the church, has never attracted much attention of those pastors, missionaries and educators from abroad, who flooded into the Soviet Union (USSR) after the fall of the iron curtain. The neglect can be explained and, to a certain degree justified, if one tries to assess the often poorly translated and lacking linear structure sermons of Russian preachers through the lens of Anglo-American homiletical tradition. Mark J. Harris, for example, speaks about preaching in Russian churches as a low quality product of a culture that had never had democracy therefore had a poor history of public speaking. Considering his rather superficial understanding of the historical, cultural and theological background of Russian Baptist churches and their practices, his article should be seen as a "foreigner's impressions of Russian Baptist preaching," rather than an academic study of any sort. [7] Henceforth preaching among Russia Baptists was always viewed as something that required correction and modification either through training or example, but not as something that deserved attention on its own.

One can find it difficult to argue with this opinion after listening to one of those sermons. Nevertheless this position is deeply mistaken, since above all it misses the point that preaching in Russia has never been viewed as a public speech developed according to some laws of rhetoric. I hope to fill in this gap with my work, by looking at Russian Baptist preaching, the history of its development and the theology behind it. However, saying that Russian preaching should be considered within its context, that it deserves to be studied on its own right, I by no means imply that whatever is pronounced from Russian Baptist pulpits has to be highly valued and that no improvements are possible. On the contrary, unfortunately there is much low quality preaching (whatever view of preaching is upheld!) taking place, and I believe Russian Baptists should be able to accept and admit this fact.

Also Konstantin Prokhorov, "Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy and Traditions," PhD Dissertation (University of Wales, IBTS, Prague, 2011).

[7] Mark J. Harris, "Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Preaching," (1996), accessed on 01.05.2015, from http://cvi2.org/pages/harris/harris_russian_baptist_preaching1996.pdf.

Paying tribute to the past and respecting the heritage and traditions are not sufficient reasons to neglect the importance of developing of even the most respected and valued practices of a Christian community. Development and growth begins with critical analysis, with the ability to see both strengths and weaknesses. This is a difficult process, since preaching, as it will be shown, often appears to be at the centre of a large web of convictions,[8] thus study and evaluation of preaching as a practice of a gathering community[9], penetrates deeply held convictions of churches and individual believers.

I hope it is obvious now that I do not begin this work with the presupposition that Russian preaching has failed, thus we need to change it. My primary goal is to see what preaching is understood to be in Russia, how it has developed, and how it fits into the convictions of Russian Baptists (in a way this is a question closely related to the main question of this research: What role does preaching play in making Russian Baptists who they are?). Also I want to ask whether preaching meets the expectations of people in churches and to see if it continues to develop together with the Church that has undergone great changes in recent years. I believe it is possible to draw many positive lessons from the large ecclesial heritage that Russian Baptists have accumulated and that it is important to recognise its value. Nonetheless I also believe that revision, critical assessment, acceptance of weaknesses and failures of preaching as it happens is equally important, even crucial for the Church today, when faithful

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8 Speaking about "convictional web" I am using the concept developed by Nancy Murphy in *Beyond Liberalism and Foundationalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity, 1996).

9 Keith Grant Jones developed the concept of a gathering believing community (as opposed to the gathered church) in his works *A Believing Church: Learning From Some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Didcot, The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998); "Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional Koinonia," in the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. 4, Issue2 (January 2004), pp 5-13. Cf. Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2005), pp 51-52. For further development of the concept see Rolling G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev, eds., *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity: Listening to the Churches in Armenia, Bulgaria, Central Asia, Moldova, North Caucasus, Omsk and Poland* (Prague, IBTS, 2006) and Parush R. Parushev, "Gathered, Gathering, Porous: Reflections on the nature of baptistic community," in the *Baptistic Theologies*, Volume 5, No 1 (Spring 2013), pp 35-52.

following of Christ is losing its appeal not only in the eyes of the secular world, but also for many Christians, especially the younger generation of the Baptist believers.

Let me offer a brief overview of my work. The first five chapters are an inquiry into the question of Russian Baptist ecclesial identity and the role of preaching (as one of their major practices and characteristic features) in forming, preserving and passing on this identity. Identity is understood as a way of communal living, which includes individual ethics, but also goes beyond it. Most of the material in the first four chapters will concentrate on questions of historical development of Russian baptistic[10] churches and their preaching, and the context in which they've existed. It has to be noted that historical material in these chapters is organised *thematically*, with each of these topics (such as cultural and theological contexts of preaching and development of baptistic educational institutions) developed *historically.*

The rather extensive presentation of the historical material as well as the analysis of the cultural and religious environment is necessary, since it highlights the connections between the ways preaching was understood and practiced and the effect it produced on the ecclesial life of the communities. Nonetheless, it must be noted that I do not aim at writing a comprehensive history of the Russian Baptist movement. Rather, it might be helpful to see the historical part of the thesis as my attempt to retell the story of Russian baptistic communities through the lens of the development of their preaching ministry. Another important issue is that I do not deal with communities of Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (RCCEF), churches that belong to the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) or any other denominations, which were part

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[10] Throughout this work the term "Baptist" will refer to the congregations which define themselves as Baptists, and which is reflected in their name. The term "baptist" or "baptistic" (with a lower case 'b') will be a reference to a wider tradition, which includes Molokans, Mennonites, Brethren, Pentecostals, Evangelical or Gospel Christians (one of the denominations that merged with the Baptist Union in forming the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB)) etc., those who share 'some or all of those values associated with believer's baptism, the autonomy of the local congregation and freedom of conscience.' (Wright, *Free Church, Free State,* pp xxiii). For the origin of the terms, see James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002, originally published in 1986), p 19; and Rollin G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev, "Editor's Preface," in Grams and Parushev, *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity*, p 10.

of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) during the Soviet time, but which exist as independent ecclesial bodies. Due to the limitations of this work I chose to focus specifically on churches that currently form the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians – Baptists (RUECB).[11]

Chapter 1 shows the important role preaching played in the formation of the first baptistic groups in the Russian Empire. Using the example of Stundist groups, I will argue that the ability to read the Bible and the attempts to interpret it within the community of believers caused excommunication of these groups from the Orthodox Church. Thus preaching in a form of retelling a biblical story with simple explanation and subsequent application became one of the main causes for the separation of baptistic communities from the main body of the Orthodox Church.

Chapter 2 deals with questions of context. It would be naïve to assume that baptistic Christians in Russia could have developed their theology and practice without any direct and indirect influence of the Orthodox Church, being a tiny minority in a country where Orthodox convictions, spirituality and ethics penetrated all areas of social life. Hence understanding Orthodox views on preaching is important. I will offer a brief overview of Orthodox concepts of Theosis, Sobornost and Charismatic preaching. A number of striking similarities with the way preaching is understood and practiced in contemporary Baptist churches will allow better understanding of various convictions related to preaching and worship, and their origin.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I will attempt to build a paradigm of the development of preaching in baptistic churches in Russia. I will show that the oppressive and hostile environment, in which these communities existed, produced a distinct imprint on their preaching – the ministry of proclamation became "over-spiritualised," with heavy emphasis placed on the spirituality and ethics of the preachers as the most important

[11] The above mentioned limitations of my research provide an important clarifying point for a rather brief overview of several important and controversial issues in the history of the AUCECB, particularly its forceful merger with Pentecostal communities in 1945 and the split in the AUCECB of 1961, resulting in the appearance of the Council of Churches. Whilst these issues are extremely important events in the history of Russian baptistic churches, they are outside of the scope of my research. I hope that this thesis will prompt in the appearance of further studies of the above mentioned ecclesial groups.

prerequisites for a successful sermon. Eventually, this gave preachers, and particularly the leadership of churches special position and authority, thus bringing issues of power into the realm of homiletics. In my analysis I will rely on magazines published by Baptists and Evangelical Christians in the first half of the 20th century, as well as several books and study manuals produced by secular authors and later by the AUCECB.

Chapter 5 will address the present state of preaching in Russian Baptist churches. I will briefly introduce the stage where preaching takes place, and will answer the question of what preaching in Russian Baptist churches is currently understood and expected to be, as well as introduce the "context of preaching" – where preaching happens, what the structure of the worship[12] service is, and who is allowed to preach. This chapter will include brief analysis of surveys collected in several Baptist communities in Voronezh, Russia, which would clarify a number of conclusions from previous chapters as to how preaching is understood in contemporary churches, and why it is considered important.

In my analysis of the origins and current state of Russian baptistic preaching I will highlight an important point: throughout their history, baptistic believers in Russa dealt with preaching solely as 'ministry of proclamation', primarily consisting of a preparatory part (rational and spiritual) and a proclamatory part (the delivery of a sermon with all the elements such as the role of the Holy Spirit, the preacher, and the listeners being taken into consideration). Depending on the resources available or the political environment around the Church, the emphasis on the most important elements of preaching changed – the more practical and professional (in terms of knowledge of theology, hermeneutics and rhetoric) approach of the turbulent years at the beginning of the 20th century was replaced by a period of survival, when personal ethics and spirituality of the preachers were emphasised even at the expense of rational preparation of a sermon. However, in essence the approach to preaching remained the same: preaching was seen as mere acts of proclamation, which

[12] Here and throughout this work I will use the term "worship" in a simple way, referring to a church gathering on Sunday morning (or any other time) with the purpose of praising God and experiencing him through singing, praying and listening to the proclaimed word. Such utilization of the word does not imply that I reject other existing views. Neither is this an attempt to define worship in a limited way. Such usage is a matter of convenience, since I will particularly focus on those practices of the community of believers that, when taken together, are commonly known as a "corporate worship" or a "worship service."

possessed some educational and spiritual power. Various schools and educational programmes that sprung up during 1990-2000s continued this trend.

Such a reductionist approach to preaching is bound to create difficulties. Various *unsuccessful*[13] educational projects as well as generally accepted *poor* quality of preaching, yet surprising lack of critical stance in local churches towards its preaching and preachers proves this point. Therefore I will argue that unless preaching is understood and taught as a practice[14] rather than a mere rhetorical skill, it would be hard to open the way for further development and growth. Employing the concept of powerful practices as developed by James W. McClendon Jr.,[15] I will point out that

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[13] I am aware that when addressing such subjects as "preaching" or "teaching preaching" a definition of "success" enters a very subjective area of individual expectations (of teachers and students, and churches that eventually hear the end product) and various theological convictions (what is the measure of success depends heavily on how preachers and their listeners understand theirs and God's work in the world and in the church). However, I deliberately use the word "unsuccessful" for several reasons. Firstly, at present, preaching in Russian Baptist churches can be characterised as low quality from both rhetorical and theological perspectives. Many preachers are aware of it, yet not sure how they could address the problem. Their listeners have learnt to have low expectations of preaching, as a consequence, there are fewer people attending churches today than there were 20 years ago. Secondly, it is still not uncommon to hear dismissive remarks about theological education in general and preachers' training in particular. Thus, even though various training programmes have produced quality preachers (both successful communicators and excellent hermeneutists), the impact of these schools and programmes is limited to their graduates, with the majority of churches and pastors still not showing their support of theological education, which is clearly seen in the lack of financial support and declining numbers of prospective students.

[14] I am using the term "practice" as Alasdair MacIntyre defines it, as 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.' (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, originally published in 1981), p 187).

[15] I am applying the theological method of James Wm. McClendon, Jr. (as presented in his trilogy *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I*; *Doctrine: Systematic Theology,* Volume *II* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994); and *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2000)) to perform a study of the practice of proclamation of Russian Baptists. (Baylor University Press (Waco, Texas) reprinted *Systematic Theology* in a three-volume set in 2012).

when teaching or evaluating preaching, its "success" should not be measured based solely on listeners' perception of separate acts of proclamation. Rather its practitioners need to be aware of the constructive potential and hidden destructive forces of the ministry they aspire to develop.

Following the view of Nigel G. Wright presented in his book *New Baptists, New Agenda* where he argues that understanding 'who I am' is an important question, which has to be answered prior to the question 'how I should live,' I will attempt to outline the constants that constitute and define a person or a particular group of people – Russian Baptist Church in my case.[16] Having studied the core practice (preaching) of the Church, I will single out the constants expressed in preaching, thus providing a tool for deeper understanding of who Russian Baptists are, which in turn would allow further development of preaching and other areas of church life. Hence the subject of baptistic identity[17] and practices that enhance and develop that identity will be the focus of Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 6 will specifically deal with the various ways of defining Baptist identity. I will use McClendon's concept of the "baptist vision" as a key to understanding baptistic theology, which is a hermeneutical principle, a lens for reading the Bible in baptistic communities that can be summed up in a motto 'this is

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[16] Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2002), p 11.

[17] "Identity" is a loaded concept, which is difficult to define. Interestingly enough, in the Russian language this word does not exist – there are different words that point to different features or facets of the concept. Its usage in different disciplines and contexts is another indication of the complexity of the notion. As this word has a certain ambiguity, it makes it very convenient to use. I am not going to explore all possible ways of defining the concept. When I speak about identity, I will refer to something that makes a person or a community part of one culture (in this case, a baptistic culture), something that makes them distinct from others, that allows them to refer to themselves as one whole, something that sets the direction for their existence and defines their practices – the set of their core convictions, which can be defined as a 'set of beliefs that shape the actual life and practices of the community. Often, these are guarded by its teachers, or elders, or authoritative leadership cadres.' (James Wm. McClendon Jr., and James M. Smyth, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, reprint (Eugene, Wipf & Stock Pub., 2002), p 91, originally published as *Understanding Religious Convictions* in 1975) Thus, speaking about "identity" and "identity formation," I address the question, of how certain convictions are being formed.

that, then is now.'[18] Such perception of a particular form of biblicism being at the heart of the movement, highlights the need to define the set of practices, which serve as a bridge from biblical reading to ethics, or communal and individual lives of people. Thus the subject of Chapter 7 is the concept of social practices and preaching as one of them. Chapter 8 is fully dedicated to the theme of communal hermeneutics and practices of reading the Bible in the community of faith, with preaching being one of them.

Chapter 9 will bring this study of preaching into the educational institution. Since 1989, when the first theological school was opened in Odessa (Ukraine),[19] seminaries, Christian institutes and universities, Bible schools and distance learning courses have been playing a more prominent role in the preparation of pastors, missionaries and even lay preachers. However, the way the subject of preaching is approached and taught, when little or no attention is paid to the role and place of proclamation in the formation of baptistic identity, hampers the potential effect their graduates can make and does not provide them with a tool to understand the environment they are intending to minister in. I will offer an overview of the courses on homiletics and baptistic identity that are taught in Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (MTSECB), and TCM – International Institute (TCMII). I have chosen to address these schools as both of them play significant role in the Russian Baptist Union as places of ministerial formation. However, they also position themselves as centres of theological reflection, offering M-level courses. It is important to indicate that while pointing at the shortcomings of the above mentioned curriculums, I do not intend to suggest any major corrections or additions. The focus of my project is to offer a critical tool that educational institutions could use to enhance their understanding of the practice of preaching and the approach they use in teaching.

Finally, it is necessary to set the limits to this study of Russian Baptist preaching. In my research I will first of all focus on preaching as a practice, and those convictions

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[18] McClendon, *Ethics,* p 29.

[19] For more information on the history of Odessa Theological Seminary see their website http://odessasem.org/ru/aboutus-ru/history-ru (accessed on 08.02.2015).

that are related to this practice. The content of preaching, though occasionally referred to, will not be paid too much attention. This neglect is deliberate, since the limitations of this work will not allow me to study all the aspects of Russian Baptist preaching. This is a first major research focusing on preaching in the context of Russian Baptist worship. It is my hope that this study may serve as a stimulus for further research and development in the area of homiletics and its role and place in the ecclesial life of baptistic churches in Russia.

CHAPTER 1. Preaching as retelling the story: the beginning of the Russian baptistic movement[1]

Introduction

A number of books written on the history of the Russian Baptist movement begin with a description of the religious scene of the Russian Empire. Frequently authors, particularly if they come from Russian baptistic tradition, claim that the appearance of the Baptist movement in Russia was a natural outcome of a search for true faith, a spiritual pilgrimage that the peoples of the Russian Empire[2] had made through the centuries.[3] Dukhobors, Khlysts, Skoptses, Starovers, Molokans and various others are mentioned as a proof of this constant spiritual search, thus showing that Russian Baptists have indigenous Russian roots, being a final product of the "pilgrimage," implying that the people have "finally found it!"[4]

Although some of these dissenters from Orthodoxy, like Molokans, do show obvious connections to at least one of the centres (in the Caucasus) where the first Russian Baptists appeared, most of these sects had little or nothing in common with Baptists. They existed and co-existed at different stages of Russian history, far earlier than the first signs

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[1] The materials of this chapter were published in a form of an article in Timofey Cheprasov, "Political and Religious Factors in the Emergence of the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire," in *Baptistic Theologies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (autumn 2010), pp 46-58.

[2] The Russian Empire was a multi-national country. Saying "Russian people" or "Russians", I refer to the various ethnic groups who lived on the territory of the Russian Empire. Such use (instead of naming all possible ethnic groups) is out of mere convenience. I neither imply that there was one ethnicity nor try to rob other nations (some of which are independent countries now) of their history.

[3] E.g. Sergey N. Savinskii, *Istoriia Russko-Ukrainskogo Baptisma: Uchebnoie Posobiie [The history of Russian-Ukrainian Baptism: Study Manual]* (Odessa, Odessa Theological Seminary "Bogomislie," 1995), p 7.

[4] Heather Coleman suggests that from the very beginning of the Baptist movement in Russia, these Christians struggled with the accusations of being of a "German faith," which inevitably raised questions of their political loyalty. Therefore, taking into account two world wars during which the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union fought with Germany, the proof of their indigenous Russian origin was crucial for the survival of the Baptist churches (Heather J. Coleman, "The Most Dangerous Sect: Baptists in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, 1905-1929," PhD dissertation (Urbana, Illinois, 1998), Chapter 1).

of Baptists in Russia can be traced. Moreover, most of these religious groups were formed around a particular charismatic leader or a group of leaders.[5] None became a major movement that received wide recognition and support of the population or spread across the country. It was only in the second half of the 19th century when evangelicals like Stundists, Paskovites[6] and Baptists began to stir minds and cause controversies in different corners of the empire. 1867 is considered to be the starting point of the Baptist movement in Russia, marked by the baptism of a Molokan leader Nikita Voronin on the 20th of August in Tiflis (contemporary Tbilisi, Georgia).[7] These dissenters from the Orthodox Church were constantly persecuted; nonetheless their numbers grew rapidly, counting tens of thousands of active members in only twenty years.[8]

The fact that the Baptist movement started only in the second half of the 19th century and quickly spread over the vast territory of the Russian Empire points towards

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[5] For more information on the history and convictions of the mentioned sects and movements see Georg Bernard Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1999); Irina Paert, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850 (*Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003); A helpful perspective can be found in A. Katunskii, *Staroobriadchestvo [Old Believers]* (Moscow, IPL, 1972), pp 39-40.

[6] *Pashkovites*, also known as *Evangelical Christians,* has a particular meaning in Russia. Evangelical or Gospel Christians is the name of a baptistic movement that began in 1870s and was associated with the names of Lord Radstock, an English lay evangelist, who made several trips to Russia, preaching among Russian nobles (see pp 58-59 of this research for information on his theological views and ministry), and Colonel Vasilii Pashkov, a wealthy aristocrat, who became a passionate evangelical preacher and a leader of the movement of Evangelical Christians (see p 60 of this thesis for a more in-depth presentation of his theological views and ministry among Russian Evangelical Christians). In 1944, Evangelical Christians merged with Baptists forming the AUCECB. (See also Sheryl Corrado, *Filosofiia Sluzheniia Polkovnika Pashkova* [*The Philosophy of Ministry of Colonel Pashkov*] (St. Petersburg, Biblia Dlya Vsekh, 2005); Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy 1860-1900: Radstockism and Pashkovism* (The Hague, Nimhoff, 1970)), and a recent study of the denomination by Andrey Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Study of Their Identity and Theology During the Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods* (Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2010).

[7] Albert W. Wardin, Jr., "Penetration of Baptists into the Russian Empire in the Nineteenth Century," in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol.7, Issue 3 (May 2007), p 45.

[8] J. G. Fetzer, "Baptists in Russia and What They Need," in *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (April 1903), p 126.

significant reasons for it. Albert W. Wardin argues that multiple factors are to be considered: the sociological, political and religious situation within Russia, the financial support, evangelistic and educational efforts of German Baptists and Mennonites as well as the passion and zeal of laypersons and indigenous evangelists in spreading the teaching that was an alternative to Orthodoxy. Nonetheless, he insists that all of these factors are secondary, pointing to the indigenous roots of the movement. [9]

Without rejecting the contribution of Christians from abroad, I wish to concentrate on the indigenous elements in the origins of the baptistic movement in Russia.[10] I will argue that the general meltdown in state internal politics and control allowed freer thinking in society, which, when projected at the serious crisis that the Russian Orthodox Church was going through, resulted in a radical movement within the Church. This movement grew out of a desire to bring a positive change into the established Church. To a large extent, this desire was a result of communal interpretation of the Bible, which in most cases took the form of preaching – a simplistic interpretation and direct application of the Scriptures into the lives of the hearers.

The politics of persecution that both civil officials and the Orthodox clergy had acquired, forced these radicals to split away, gradually forming a new denomination. One of the major marks of this denomination was preaching. Thus my claim is that preaching, developed in a particular form of retelling the biblical story with its immediate unsophisticated interpretation,[11] played a formative role in establishing and spreading of the Russian Baptist movement.

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[9] "Penetration of Baptists…", p 47.

[10] For more information on this subject see Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* where he argues that the roots of the movement of Evangelical Christians or Pashkovites, must be seen in an Anglo-American pietistic tradition. Similarly, Konstantin Prokhorov points out that 'it is hardly possible to doubt seriously that the Ukrainian Stundists initially accepted "from the Germans" at least some important paradigms of a Protestant perception of the Holy Scriptures.' ("Between the West and the East: Notes on the origin of the evangelical movement in Russia," in *Theological Reflections*, Vol. 13 (2012), p 82.)

[11] It is important to emphasise that preaching among Russian Baptists at the earlier stages of their development had a very particular form and meaning. Its main purpose was retelling the story of the Bible in understandable language and offering a simple application. Very often, it was a message about Christ, which was always followed by an invitation to repent and believe

In the following pages I am going to start with a general overview of the socio-political situation in the Russian Empire and then narrow my focus to a particular case – the communities of the Ukrainian Stundists and their gradual dissent from the Orthodox Church. I will make a claim that Biblicism, embodied in a form of communal preaching was a major driving force behind the formation of the new denomination on the Russian religious scene, since a similar pattern could be observed in the movement of the Gospel Christians in St. Petersburg and the first Baptist churches in the Caucasus.

1.1 Socio-political and religious situation in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century

The second half of the 19th century was marked by a set of unique prerequisites, making Russian society a fertile soil for the emergence and spread of the baptistic movement. These were freedom, the religious crisis, and the Bible. Freedom came as a result of the politics of Alexander II, who had freed the serfs and allowed greater social freedoms.[12] The crisis that struck the Russian Orthodox Church at that time prompted many people to look for other forms of religious expression. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to say that they started searching for an alternative denomination or religion. However, without any doubt there was a great desire to see changes within the established Church. And last but not least, the fact that for the first time in history the Bible was published in contemporary Russian language and was made widely available, allowed people to further explore Christian faith for themselves.

Freedom

The rule of Emperor Nicolas I ended in 1856 leaving Russia facing complete catastrophe. The loss in the Crimean War, and the consequent destruction of Russia's

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in Him. Constant lack of Bibles and a great number of uneducated people made this kind of preaching the only possible way of spreading the Good News. Cf. Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont., Herald Press, 1981).

[12] Despite various social reforms, Russia's political system remained the same – an absolute monarchy with strict control of all spheres of political, social, and religious life of the country. Nonetheless, the reign of Alexander II was marked by far greater political, social and religious freedoms than any other era of Russian imperial history.

military prestige and political influence, 'was a severe blow to national self-esteem.'[13] Gregory L. Freeze points out that, 'The Crimean War not only exacted a high cost in lives, resources, and prestige, but also vitiated the main impediment to reform – the belief that the existing order was consonant with stability and power.'[14] Failure in foreign politics and serious internal economic problems caused disillusionment in the ideas of Russia's uniqueness and superiority, resulting in an epistemological crisis of a sort.[15] All of that defined a need for renewal. Alexander II appeared to be the answer to that need. Although his life tragically ended with his assassination, his reign could be considered as one of the most important periods in Russian history. His reforms were incomplete and could not untie the knot of the social and economic problems of society, with perhaps tragic consequences. Still the impact of Alexander II, "Tsar-Liberator", whose rule is known as the Epoch of Great Reforms in Russian history, cannot be overestimated.

One of the most needed reforms was related to the institution of serfdom – a form of slavery that was beginning to create a threat for the stability of the country. The process of freeing the serfs was initiated in 1857 with the work of the Committee on Peasant Reform. Public discussions were initiated, for the first time in Russian history, bringing the social problems, which were already highly criticised in progressive literature, into focus for the whole country. The process concluded in 1861 when all the serfs were freed and given the possibility to buy land allotments and transfer them into private or communal property.[16]

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[13] George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia,* 3d revised edition (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1951, originally published in 1933 by Oxford University Press), p 156.

[14] Gregory L. Freeze, "Reform and Counter Reform 1855-1890," in *Russia, A History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002, originally published in 1997) p 172.

[15] I am referring to Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of a crisis of self-perception caused by a certain discovery or event. As MacIntyre notes, 'such a discovery is often paralysing, and… social life as we know it could scarcely continue.'("Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), pp 138-139).

[16] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia, 7th ed.* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, originally published in 1993), p 344.

Without describing all the complexities of the reform, it is sufficient to say that the peasants were left with the feeling that they were robbed of freedom, since their expectations of getting land as well as economic independence were not met. They became even poorer than before – freedom brought hunger. This dissatisfaction resulted in numerous violent revolts, and 'although the number of disorders gradually declined (849 in 1862, 509 in 1863, 156 in 1864), the village continued to seethe with resentment and discontent.'[17] Former serf-owners were far from being happy as well. They lost their power without receiving proper compensation for their property; they were short of finances and lacked prospects for the future. A lot of them went bankrupt, being unable to adjust to a changing social reality.[18] Thus the nobility turned into the opposition to the government, hoping to receive some of the political powers in exchange for being deprived of their social and economic privileges. As several historians note, despite the fact that the reforms had transformed the country, it became one of the major reasons for the Revolution of 1918.[19]

Gradual relaxation of censorship (1865) was another important element of freedom. Although censorship was not removed from social life, it was changed from pre-censorship to post-censorship, with much weaker control. This 'significantly enhanced the ability of the press to publish quickly and, within limits, to exercise some freedom of expression.'[20] Soon after the introduction of the new law, a great amount of earlier prohibited literature was published, bringing new philosophical, social, religious and cultural ideas onto the public scene.[21] Education also underwent a significant change. Many new schools were opened across the country. Each university[22] found

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[17] Freeze, *Russia, A History*, p 177.

[18] The inability of nobility to adapt to the changing socio-economic realities is well depicted in a famous play by Anton P. Chekhov, *Vishnevii Sad [The Cherry Orchard].*

[19] Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, pp 159-169. Cf. Freeze, *Russia, A History*, p 170.

[20] Freeze, *Russia, A History*, p 180.

[21] See C. E. Black, ed., *The Transformation of Russian Society: Aspects of Social Change since 1861* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960).

[22] It must be noted, that in this thesis the term "University" is used in two ways. In Chapters 1 and 3, the term is used in relation to any institution of higher education. In Chapter 9 "University" is used more narrowly, as a reference to only theological educational institutions.

itself turned into a 'self-governing corporation, with far greater rights for its teaching staff and even some recognition of student rights.'[23] These great freedoms that universities received resulted in rapid development of Russian philosophical thought and increased the political involvement of the people. The changes also carried certain negative features. Universities became known as places of liberal thinking, nests of atheism and ungodliness, and even as producers of revolutionaries and rebels. The following statement partly explains the origins of contemporary 'anti-intellectualism' among Russian Baptists:[24]

> The university students contributed the greatest number of radical and revolutionary leaders. The majority of the students consisted of men who had no means whatsoever. The average student lived in a state of semi-starvation, earning his way through the university by giving lessons or by copying. The majority of the students had no notion of sport and no taste for it. Lack of physical exercise and consequent ill-health had a crushing effect upon the psychology of the students…[25]

As a consequence of the above mentioned factors, as well as major administrative and judicial reform, there appeared a new social class – *Raznochintsy*.[26] The core of this group was the growing educated middle class: doctors, engineers, scientists, writers, publishers, journalists. The group expanded in size and particularly

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[23] Freeze, *Russia, A History*, p 178.

[24] See also the story, composed by Ivan S. Prokhanov, which points to the tradition of a negative attitude towards higher education, which was caused by the negative reputations of the universities. The article was written to overcome such an attitude in Russian Baptist churches (Ivan S. Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii 1869-1933: Avtobiografiia Ivana Stepanovicha Prokhanova S Izlozheniiem Glavnikh Faktov Dvizheniia Evangelskikh Khristian v Rossii [In the Cauldron of Russia 1869-1933: An Autobiography of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov with the Story of Main Fact Regarding the Movement of Evangelical Christians in Russia]* (Druckhaus Gummersbach, 1992), pp 51-52).

[25] Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, p 169. The above mentioned struggles and despair of the poor students was illustrated by Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky in the person of Rodion Raskolnikov, the main character of the novel *Prestupleniie i Nakazaniie [Crime and Punishment].*

[26] "Raznochintsy" is a complex word that consists of two roots – "raznii", which means "different" and "chin" - "social status". Thus, the name of this class meant "a mixture of people of different sorts, who were neither peasants, nor aristocracy."

in its social importance. Although still relatively small in numbers, these people were extremely active in the society. Ironically, this new class, which was in many ways a result of the Great Reforms of Alexander II, despised both the reforms and the government, demanding complete transformation of the Russian state.[27]

This general dissatisfaction with the existing order and the belief that the reforms were incomplete also had some positive results. One of them was a "populist movement," based upon a belief that it was possible to achieve the transformation of the whole society through education and the enlightenment of the masses. As noted by Edmund Heier,

> The movement reached its peak in 1873-74 when thousands, not only of young men and women, but also of men in well-established professions, [including hundreds of aristocrats] roamed the Russian countryside, often dressed as peasants, to carry out their enlightening propagandist activities. They abandoned the universities and life of comfort in order to serve the people and be one with them in spirit.[28]

However, peasants turned out to be the most conservative class of Russian society. Thus most of them did not welcome these ideas. They neither accepted these "western things" nor the people who were trying to "enlighten" them. Police archives hold multiple accounts of peasants reporting to the police on the activities of the populists.

The history of Russian society in the second half of the 19th century presents a fascinating mosaic of new philosophical ideas and attempts to implement these ideas and translate them into reality. It was a period that many historians call the "Russian

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[27] "Nihilism" was one of its extreme manifestations. This movement was popular among the educated youth and was marked by a rejection of absolute values and belief in the absolute power of science. This was not a revolutionary movement, though; rather nihilists were marked by a 'negative attitude towards existing convention, social, political and religious institutions'. (Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy,* p 6. See also Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 167-211.)

[28] Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy*, pp 6-7. D. N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, "'Kaiushchiesia Dvoriane' i Raznochintsy 60-kh Godov," *Istoriia Russkoi Intelligentsii* (Sobranie Sochinenii) ["'The Repenting Nobles' and Razhochintsy of the 60-s," in *The History of Russian Intelligentsia (The Collection of Works)*], Vol. 8 (St. Petersburg, 1911), pp 83-99. Also Andreas E. Buss, *The Russian-Orthodox Tradition and Modernity* (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2003), pp 120-128.

Enlightenment," which significantly changed and influenced the development of the country. However, despite all the newness, freedom and openness, or perhaps because of it, one of the major results of this time was a deeply divided society.

The crisis

Without any doubt, in the second half of the 19th century, Russian society was in a spiritual crisis. The educated intelligentsia and nobility were seeking answers in science. The uneducated peasants turned to the Orthodox Church, which, itself needed help. The beginning of the crisis that struck the Russian Orthodox Church can be traced to the time of Peter the Great. One of his numerous reforms was the removal of the figure of a Patriarch from the political and social stage of the Russian state. Instead Peter instituted the new governing body of the Orthodox Church, Most Holy Governing Synod, presided over by a civil official, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod. This marked the change from the Orthodox Church being the heart of the Russian nation into its becoming an institution, a "ministry of spiritual affairs" of a sort, which was gradually drifting away from the needs and struggles of the people, serving only the interests of the state. This 'dealt a terrible blow to the Russian Church [after which] she was paralysed for two centuries.'[29] The state officials understood the value of the church as an influential agent; thus they were always concerned about its "well-being." As noted by Vera Shevzov,

> State-initiated regulations during the eighteenth century made themselves felt in internal, even sacred, aspects of ecclesial life. Toward the goal of proper ordering of the state, which included a populace of good Orthodox standing, state officials often took an interest in ensuring that church life was properly observed. In this vein, for instance, a 1774 directive delegated to local civil officials the responsibility of making sure that people attended church on Sundays and major feast days, thereby blurring the boundaries between civil and purely ecclesial life. A similar blurring of boundaries was evident in civil legislation mandating annual confession and Communion.[30]

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[29] Helene Iswolsky, *Christ in Russia: The History, Tradition, and Life of the Russian Church* (Milwaukee, The Bruce Publishing Company, 1960), p 113.

[30] Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p 17.

Thus entering a time of social unrest and radical movements, a time of disillusionment and spiritual search for the meaning of life by many people, the Church needed help itself. Its clergy were unable and, to a certain degree, uninterested in understanding and helping people. Its witness, ethical life and teaching were almost non-existent due to corruption caused by poverty, poor education and almost total lack of support given to local parish clergy. The teaching of the Church, its rites and liturgy were unclear and seemed inadequate to simple people and were considered irrelevant by the nobility and intelligentsia.[31]

Not surprisingly, one of the reforms of Alexander II was related to the Orthodox Church. Freeze observes that

> Special commissions designed a broad range of reforms, including the establishment of parish councils in 1864 (to raise funds for local needs), the reform of ecclesiastical schools in 1867 (modernising curriculum and opening schools to youths from all social classes), the formal abolition of the clerical caste in 1867, and a radical reorganisation of parishes in 1868. Still more reforms were in preparation…[32]

Ironically, it was exactly such "care" on behalf of the state that resulted in the above mentioned crisis, and in the unwillingness and hostility of the Orthodox clergy to conform to the reforms.[33] The church leaders saw that the church 'was kept like a captive under the pretext of its own safety,'[34] whilst state officials were blunt about

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[31] Sergei Margaritov, a Russian Orthodox priest at the beginning of the 20th century, offered an Orthodox perspective on the reasons for the appearance and spread of the baptistic movements in Russia (whilst his work is written with a clear denominational stance, it still provides valuable insight into the life and practice of early evangelical groups in Russia). He names among the first the failure of the Orthodox Church to provide guidance for the freed serfs, and the uncontrolled reading and interpretation of the Bible. (*Istoriia Russkikh Misticheskikh i Ratsionalisticheskikh Sect [The History of Russian Mystical and Rationalistic Sects],* Izdanie 3, dopolnennoie (Simpheropol, Tavricheskaia Gubernskaia Tipografiia, 1910), pp 147-148).

[32] Freeze, *Russia, A History*, p 180.

[33] A. I. Polunov, "Church, Regime, and Society in Russia (1880-1895)," in *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2001), p 34.

[34] Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy*, p 17.

the nature of their care. Consider the words of Dmitrii A. Tolstoi (Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod from 1865 to 1880) about the role the Church was to take within the state system, 'I view the clergy… as no more and no less than a force that must be subordinate to the government and of which a wise government can make clever use for its own ends.'[35]

As seen from this brief overview of Russian society at the second half of the 19th century, both society and the official Church were struggling with serious issues, looking for new ways of development, and realising the need for a change. It was an age of disillusionment with the "kind Tsar" working for the freed serfs, and there was disillusionment with socialist ideas among the wide spectrum of intelligentsia, some of whom turned to terrorism; it was an age of either scepticism and cynicism or the rise of conservative ideas among the aristocracy. That was a time when the guidance of the Church was especially needed but was missing.[36]

The Bible

The history of the Russian people receiving the printed Scripture began in 1816, the year when the Bible in Old Church Slavonic was published. The first Russian translation of the New Testament was published in 1822 – with 25 000 volumes produced. Unfortunately, the initiative to translate and publish the Bible into Russian at that time was not supported by the Orthodox clergy. After the death of Alexander I, the Bible Society was closed and those New Testaments that were not distributed were burnt.

The second period of making the Bible widely available is closely connected to the name of Moscow Metropolitan Philaret (1782-1867). Under his influence the Holy

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[35] Evgenii M. Feoktistov, *Vospominaniia. Zakulisami Politiki i Literatury 1848- 1896 [Memoirs. Behind the Curtains of Politics and Literature 1848 - 1896]* (Leningrad, Priboi, 1929), p 169.

[36] It would be an exaggeration to say that there was widespread disillusionment in the role and place of the Orthodox Church in Russian society, as Heier puts it in his analysis (see Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy,* Chapter 1), which became the reason for the rise to the Evangelical movement known as Radstokism or Pashkovism. The whole society was so deeply Orthodox (both peasants and nobles) that people could not see a viable alternative, and could not imagine a different way of life. Later in this chapter, when looking at Stundists, I will point to the fact that neither Stundism nor Pashkovism began as an alternative to Orthodoxy. Rather, they were sincere attempts to bring about a positive change in the Church and into the country.

Synod took a decision to translate the Bible into the then contemporary Russian language. 1862 was a crucial year for Russian Christianity. In that year the New Testament in contemporary language was published. In 1863 a small group began raising funds to assist people in purchasing Bibles. Three years later this group grew into the Society of Distribution of the Holy Scriptures in Russia, supported by the Imperial government. The full Russian Synodal Bible was published in 1876.[37] The work of this and other organisations that were involved in the spread of the Scriptures was tremendous. During 30 years of this ministry they sold and distributed over 1.5 million copies of the New Testament, including 150 thousand copies distributed in the Asian part of the Russian Empire. Many of these books were distributed by special people – colporteurs, full-time travelling distributors of Bibles and other spiritual literature. They walked through towns and villages, carrying the books and the Good News – sales were always coupled by simple preaching.[38]

1.2 The Stundist dissent: a case study

Now I would like to turn to one of the main centres of evangelical revival in Russia – to the first peasant Stundist communities in Ukraine, looking at their beginning, characteristic features and practices, which caused their excommunication from the Orthodox Church. This was accompanied by persecutions from both the clergy and the Russian state and led to the eventual formation of a new denomination. In this short study I am deliberately omitting the Stundist movement among German colonists. Rather my focus will be on the first known communities of Ukrainian Stundists, because there is much evidence that they appeared without direct German influence. Obviously, it will not be possible to provide a comprehensive picture of the Stundist movement - it was not coordinated, and had various leaders with different agendas and doctrines. Nonetheless,

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[37] Y. Reshetnikov, S. Sannikov, *Obzor Istorii Evangelskogo - Baptistskogo Bratstva Na Ukraine [The Overview of the History of the Evangelical-Baptist Brotherhood in the Ukraine]* (Odessa, Bogomislie, 2000), pp 68-69.

[38] Robert G. Torbet, Albert W. Wardin, Sergey N. Savinskii, *A History of the Baptists* (Odessa, Bogomislie, 1996), p 321. Also Viktor Dick, *Svet Evangeliia v Kazakhstane: Istoriia Vozvessheniia Evangeliia i Rasprostraneniia Obshin Baptistov i Menonnitov v Kazakhstane (pervaia polovina XX veka) [The Light of the Gospel in Kazakhstan: The History of the Proclamation of the Gospel and the Spreading of the Baptist and Mennonite Communities in Kazakhstan (first half of the XX century)]* (Samenkorn, Steinhagen, 2003), p 67.

there was one feature that characterised every single community or group called Stundists – communal preaching, a simplistic reading of the Bible with its subsequent application to the immediate life situation led by various members of their communities.

The first community of Ukrainian Stundists was formed in 1862 in Osnova, a village in the southern Ukraine. The group met in the house of the village elder (starosta) Mikhail Ratushnii for prayer, Bible study and singing.[39] Due to the numerous similarities of this group with German Stundist practices,[40] these Christians were labelled as "Ukrainian Stunda."[41] Yet, the report of the local priest to the Archbishop claimed neither that the peasants were visiting "the German churches" nor that "the German pastors" preached among them.[42] Therefore, the group was not persecuted at the beginning. The members of the group were devout Orthodox believers who actively participated in all church services and ceremonies, and read and studied the Bible and used it as a guide for their lives.[43] About four years later "Stunda" began to spread into the neighbouring villages.[44]

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[39] The police reports show that Ratushnii started his meetings in 1862 (Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917* (Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), p 192), which is another important indirect confirmation of the importance of the Bible's appearance in the hands of lay people.

[40] These practices can be identified as evening meetings for Bible study, extemporaneous prayer and singing Christian hymns. Their exemplary moral life, manifested in the rejection of consumption of alcohol and use of bad language was another "similarity". As Arsenii Rozhdestvenskii puts it, 'They did not pay attention to the theoretical side of faith, but they put to the front its practical moments – the desire to live according to the Scripture, trying to live out the Christian ideals.' (*Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism [Southern-Russian Stundism]* (St. Petersburg, Tipographiia Departamenta Udelov, 1889), p 1).

[41] Nicolay N. Yarigin, in his analysis of the emergence of the Baptist movement in Russia, argues that the label "stunda" was invented by the Orthodox clergy, in order to create an image of the foreign origins of the movement in the eyes of simple peasants and, more importantly, of the state officials. For the same reason, there were attempts to "link" Ukrainian Stundists to the Peasant Wars of 16th century. (*Evangelskoie Dvizheniie v Volgo-Viatskom Regione [Evangelical Movement in Volgo-Viatski Region]* (Moskva, Akademicheskii Proiekt, 2004), p 28.

[42] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism*, p 57.

[43] Ibid., pp 56-57.

[44] In 1865 there were about 20 people in the group; by 1867 the numbers grew to 35 families; in 1870 there were over 200 members. (Reshetnikov, Sannikov, *Obzor Istorii*, p 77).

Although the police disliked that, suspecting Stundists of preaching the "German faith," they could not find 'any evidence of a German presence at the peasant meetings, [recognising that] the peasants read only books printed by the Russian Orthodox publishing houses.'[45] There are documents showing that sometimes Stundist leaders were arrested for 'teaching the Gospel falsely' but were quickly released, after the Orthodox priests visited them. This shows that the police at that time did not consider Stundists to be spreading a different faith, which was a criminal offence.[46]

There were several important characteristics of this first Stundist group. First, the group was an indigenous movement that was formed around an educated individual (Ratushnii) in order to read and reflect upon the Bible.[47] According to Ratushnii's personal witness, he decided to start his home-group after a village meeting, where 'the peasants asked the local priest questions about religion' but the priest was unable to answer them. Thus Ratushnii decided to invite these people into his house and to explain to them what the Bible had to say on their questions.[48]

Second, the movement was not an alternative to the Orthodox Church. It was an attempt to add to the Church's existing practices something that people were lacking – relevant guidance for their daily living. This point could be strengthened by considering the fact that the priest in Osnova was Greek, and could not speak Russian. Thus how could he give the needed guidance? However, acting on some strange conviction, upon his arrival in

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[45] Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation*, p 165.

[46] The story of Ivan G. Ryaboshapka, one of the prominent leaders at the beginning of the baptistic movement in Russia, can be a good example of how initially the Orthodox Church did not perceive Stundist preaching as spreading another denomination or a sect. Ryaboshapka was arrested in 1867 and in 1878 being accused of 'teaching the Gospel falsely,' but every time he was released after visiting a local priest for instruction, confession and communion. (Bishop Alexii (Doronitsin), *Materiali Dlia Istorii Vozniknovenia i Rasprostroneniia Stundi Na Yuge Rossii [Materials for the History of the Appearance and Spread of the Stundist movement in the South of Russia] (*Kazan Kievskaia Starina, 1884), p 11).

[47] Some Ukrainian authors show the connection between the conversion of Ratushnii and the peasant Fyodor Onischenko, who, presumably, was baptised by German Stundists in 1858. (Torbet, Wardin, Savinskii, *A History of the Baptists*, p 327.) However, in a personal conversation, Albert Wardin indicated that he was not able to find any documented proof of the existence of such a link.

[48] Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation*, p 166.

this area, he began prohibiting people from reading the Scripture in their homes, insisting on them visiting his house to receive answers to their questions.[49]

The third characteristic feature of the movement was its gradual turn to German Mennonites and then later to Baptists. This however was largely due to the rejection of what they were doing by the Orthodox clergy.[50] The breakaway from the Orthodox Church started to happen almost six years after the group began to meet for Bible study/preaching and prayer. The dissent was neither the primary goal of Ratushnii nor a sign of German (nor any other) influence. Carl Bonnekemper, a German pastor who arrived in the Ukraine to minister to German colonists, explained this to the governor of the Kherson province,

> The majority of Russian peasants wanted to read and understand the New Testament. They asked the Orthodox priests for instruction and help. But not receiving assistance from the Russian clergy the religious peasants turned to the representatives of non-Orthodox churches.[51]

Wardin argued that German Baptist missionaries did not try to evangelise the Russian Orthodox population 'until after the Stundist movement had started… If anything, Ukrainian Stundists will reach out to Baptists rather than Baptists reaching out to them.'[52] The shift from Orthodox-Stundism to Baptist-Stundism started when

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[49] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism*, p 57. Also Doronitsin, *Materiali Dlia Istorii*, p 48.

[50] Doronitsin quotes a complaint of Ratushnii that was sent to the police, after he and three other members of their group were beaten by some extremist Orthodox peasants. In the complaint, Ratushnii stated that they were persecuted for reading and studying the Bible, implying that his group were still members of the Orthodox Church, who had no intention to leave the mother-church. (*Materiali Dlia Istorii,* pp 67-68).

[51] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv [Russian State Historical Archive], f.796, op. 149, d.448, 1.9; F.821, op. 5, d.991, 1.2-2ob. (Quoted after Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation*, p 192). See also a police report from Odessa Region, as quoted by Doronitsin, which says that '… Stundists are not a religious sect; rather they appear to be a social group that believes that the Bible is better to be read at home, rather than in a church, where its reading is difficult for them to understand. That is why they gather in selected homes, read the Gospels, and interpret it as they can.' (*Materiali Dlia Istorii,* p 64).

[52] Albert W. Wardin, "How Indigenous was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire?" in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (January 2009), pp 34-35.

Efim Tsymbal persuaded Abraham Unger, a Mennonite Brethren preacher, to carry out water baptism for him and several other converted peasants in 1869.[53] Tsymbal in turn baptised Ivan Ryaboshapka, who became one of the most prominent preachers of the new movement. In 1871 Ryaboshapka baptised Ratushnii and forty-eight people from his group.[54] The name of Johann Wieler should be mentioned at this point.[55] After 1869 he had developed close relationships with Ratushnii and other Stundists, counselling 'them to withdraw entirely from the Orthodox Church and form their own congregations.'[56] This began the transformation of Stundists as a radical Orthodox wing into independent baptistic communities. On November 28, 1871 Ratushnii informed Archbishop Dmitrii about their withdrawal from the Orthodox Church.[57] After that he and his followers took all the icons and crosses that they had in their homes and brought them to a local Orthodox church-building and left them there, thus marking their complete departure from the Orthodox way of life and worship.[58]

Ratushnii's group was only one among many that sprang up in the south of Ukraine at the beginning of the 1860s. Some of them were clearly linked to the German settlers, whilst others did not show any connection. Some appeared independently, others were "planted" by known Stundist leaders. Yet it is possible to point to several

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2005), p 16. See also Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism*, chapter 2.

[55] Johann Wieler, a German Mennonite, played one of the leading roles in the formation of the Baptist movement in the south of the Russian Empire and the Russian Baptist Union. Being closely connected to J. Gerhard Oncken and German Baptists, Wieler started the first German speaking Baptist church in Odessa in the late 1860-s. At the beginning of the 1970s he supported Stundists in their unsuccessful appeals to the emperor to obtain greater religious freedom. Wieler was one of the main organisers and a chairman at the 1884 conference in Novo-Vasilievka, when the Russian Baptist Union was formed. At that conference Weiler was elected as the first president of the union. (see Johanness Dyck, "Moulding the Brotherhood: Johann Wieler (1839-1889): And the Communities of the Early Evangelicals in Russia," MTh Thesis (Prague, IBTS, 2007)).

[56] Wardin, "How Indigenous was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire?", p 35.

[57] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism,* p 108.

[58] Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol. 1, p 115.

features that all these groups shared. First, for a number of years all of them continued to practice their Orthodox faith, including infant baptism, attending the church, observing the fasts and holidays, venerating icons, etc. They all shared the desire to read and study the Bible in their homes. They practiced high standards of moral life. They were keen evangelists – passionately telling/retelling what the Bible was teaching.

Considering their sincere faith, zeal for study and application of the Bible, and strict moral rules that governed their lives, it could be said that Stundists were exemplary Orthodox believers. However, the local clergy could neither understand nor accept these new expressions of the Orthodox spirituality, and tried to suppress them, often seeking assistance in this task from the state authorities and the police. Such actions caused the breakaway of these non-conformists, who were already dissatisfied with the official Church, beginning to see it as "idolatrous" and "false."[59] Naturally, they turned to the non-Orthodox churches for help, which became a beginning for the baptist movement.[60]

Despite their newly gained non-Orthodox identity, the baptistic movement grew among the peasants, the most conservative of Russia's social groups. This can only be explained by the closeness of the new movement to the beliefs and worldviews of simple people. Unlike the efforts of populists, considered by peasants as western and therefore rejected, baptist movements that had indigenous Orthodox roots and theology, were able to offer "an updated", more relevant version of the church, providing people with moral guidance, down-to-earth understandable spirituality, and a community where everyone could take an active role in prayer, reading the Bible (which also included preaching) and worship.[61]

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[59] Ibid., p 103.

[60] For a similar analysis of the roots of the non-Orthodox religious movements at the end of the 19th century, see Margaritov, *Istoriia Russkikh Misticheskikh i Ratsionalisticheskikh Sect*. He argued that the major reasons for the spread of these 'sects' were lack of religious knowledge among the Russian people and yet their search for the spiritual truth, the clergy's failure to offer spiritual and moral guidance to the people, and the Bible that was given to the people (pp 85-86, 147-148).

[61] Perhaps it is worth noting that this zeal for the simplistic reading of the Bible and a strong conviction that God spoke to his people through preaching of every brother or sister in Christ has often led to various extremes in both the interpretation of the Bible and in communal

Conclusion

Let me draw a brief conclusion. In this chapter I have attempted to map the nature of the Great Reforms of the second half of the 19th century in the Russian Empire. The reforms resulted in a shaken and transformed society with more open and freer thinking, yet at the same time a society that was deeply divided at all levels – economic, social and spiritual. Unfortunately, the Orthodox Church at this turning point of Russian history was not able to provide either moral or spiritual guidance for its people. Partly this inability was compensated for by the Bible being translated into the contemporary Russian language and made widely available for people, who started to read it in private, but more frequently in small home-groups.

Such grass-roots communitarian reading and lay preaching (interpretation and application) of the Bible resulted in a very distinct life style, which emphasized the need to lead a holy and pious life, and certain convictions about faith, which enabled lay people to take on the roles traditionally only available to the clergy (particularly biblical interpretation). All of this was considered as threatening to the Church and therefore to the state; thus causing persecution and eventual dissent of these groups from the Orthodox Church, ultimately bringing about the formation of a new denomination. Therefore, it is possible to speak about the practice of reading the Bible in a community and preaching, understood as retelling, simplistic interpretation with immediate application of the biblical stories as an initial formative force that helped to single out and to establish the Russian Baptist movement.

Certainly, these are not the only components that resulted in the appearance and the spread of Russian Baptists. I have mentioned only a few, omitting other important influences, such as the life and example of the German settlers, the sporadic contributions of missionaries of various sorts, and many other things. This omission was done for only one reason – all those additional elements, though important, did not produce any significant results until the Bible and the ability to read it was given to the people.

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practices, including relationships with Orthodox believers. This, however, is a subject for another study.

CHAPTER 2. Understanding the context: theological nest of the Russian Orthodox Church

Introduction

The main purpose of the previous chapter was to show the important role that the practice of reading the Bible in a community of believers played at the beginning of the baptistic movement in Russia. No doubt those few pages cannot provide comprehensive coverage for such a complex subject as the origins of Russian Baptists. The definition of the historical identity of Russian Baptists is a complicated, if not an impossible, task. Historical works on the topic include a wide spectrum of various ideas and perspectives from emphasizing the crucial role of western evangelicals (either British, such as Lord Radstock, or German colonists, and missionaries from other countries that served in the South of the Russian Empire) to an equally persuasive view that this was an indigenous movement conceived and developed without any significant influences from the outside of Russian society.

Consequently, after long hours of reading and comparing various books, articles and dissertations a careful reader may end up in a state of confusion, deciding that the task of writing a comprehensive history of the baptistic origin in Russia is impossible to fulfil. Such statements may prove to be right as so far no 'scheme regarding the emergence of the Evangelical Christian and Baptist movements in Russia [that could] integrate all related issues' was developed.[1] It would not be wrong to suggest therefore, that the wide spectrum of the existing positions provide only partial insight into the historical background of the movement, since similar to the Anabaptist polygenetic origins, the roots of the contemporary Russian Baptist movement should be searched in numerous large and small movements, groups, leaders and influences.[2] And similar to the origins of Anabaptists, the emergence and the spread of all these "heresies," as the Russian Orthodox Church named them, at a scale that Russian

[1] Alexander Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as Hermeneutical Community: Examining the Identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) Through the Way the Bible Was Used in its Publications", PhD Dissertation (University of Wales, IBTS, Prague, 2010), pp 31-32.

[2] For a critique of the traditional tripartite theory of the origins of Russian Baptists See A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," pp 34-35. Cf. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation.*

society had never experienced before, was triggered by the availability of the Bible in contemporary Russian language.[3]

Despite the fact that the Bible was available to the wide masses of people, education was not common in Russian society; hence not many were able to read it. On a positive side, the number of schools and, therefore, of educated people was growing. Still by the end of the 19th century the vast majority of the population could neither read nor write. Therefore preaching became a major way of spreading the biblical message amongst the people. This brings me back to the subject of my study, the role of preaching in Russian baptist communities, and focuses the following chapters on the practice of preaching, its context and development in the baptistic communities in the Russian Empire, later the USSR, and finally in contemporary Russia.

Every baptistic community develops in unique historical, socio-political and theological settings, which brings about the ultimate diversity of baptistic believers across the globe. Today, preaching in Russian Baptist churches (and a number of other practices and convictions) differs significantly from preaching in churches in Germany, England or North America. Most of the existing differences are due to the unique context in which Russian baptistic communities developed. Thus, an insight into a number of major influences is crucial for an understanding of preaching in Russia, and how it was shaped. Chapter 2 will address the prevalent theological context of the Russian Empire. Then, an analysis of major baptistic publications will provide an inroad into the complex relationships between the church and the oppressive state regimes (Chapter 3 and 4). This will shed light onto some peculiarities of preaching in Russia. And finally, (Chapter 5) using a number of surveys from contemporary Baptist churches, I will try to answer the question, "What is the meaning of preaching in Russian Baptist churches?"

In my article "Back to the Future: The Discovery of the Future of Russian Baptist Social Involvement through the Narratives of the Past"[4] I have argued that since Russian baptistic communities developed in a particular cultural and theological context, which

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[3] E.g. Johannes A. Hebly, *Protestants in Russia* (Belfast, Christian Journals Limited, 1976), pp 41-49.

[4] Timofey Cheprasov, "Back to the Future: The Discovery of the Future of Russian Baptist Social Involvement through the Narratives of the Past," in *Baptistic Theologies*, Vol. 3, No 2 (IBTS, Prague, 2011), p 88.

inevitably influenced their theology and practice, they needed to look into their past, into the convictions regarding charitable work which have always been highly regarded in Russian culture, and to develop a paradigm for their future social involvement. Apart from *the ministry of the Word*, social work has always played an important role on the baptistic agenda. Nonetheless, the main reason why those charitable activities were both welcomed by society, and widely supported by the Baptists themselves, was because such ministries were deeply rooted in the social mind-set, coming from a particular theological background, specific understanding of personal holiness, and salvation.

Similarly, in order to have a deeper insight into the contemporary practice of preaching in Russian baptistic communities, it is vital to be able to identify those convictions and see what lasting impact they had produced. Konstantin Prokhorov in his recent PhD dissertation "Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy and Traditions" presented extensive research of the subject, arguing that Russian Baptist Churches have received a vast heritage from Orthodoxy, which resulted in great similarities in theology and practice between these two seemingly very different Christian Traditions. Thus, in this chapter it would suffice to offer a brief overview of the Orthodox theological context in which baptistic communities were developing, restricting my attention to only three themes, which I believe are of immediate importance when it comes to studying the subject of Russian Baptist preaching. These are theosis or deification, sobornost or social conformity, the impact these convictions produced on preaching, and the perception of both the sermon and the preacher by the congregation. Finally, I will turn to the subject of preaching in the Orthodox Church, and particularly their concept of "charismatic preaching."

2.1 Theosis: the way…

The following quotation from *Bratskii Vestnik (BV),* the official journal of the Russian Baptist Union may serve as a helpful introduction of the importance of Orthodox spirituality for the baptistic movement in Russia:

> Is it difficult for us to humble ourselves before the Lord and to consider ourselves as great sinners? We are all sinners. We are poor and lazy in obeying the will of God. How many commandments we do not fulfil and how many commandments we break! When we come before the face of God, first of all we need to ask for mercy, patience and forgiveness…

> A true Christian must weep about losing the image of God and constantly insulting Him with our sins. He must weep about bearing a name of a Christian and yet not fulfilling the promises given at baptism, about following the earthly, without thinking about heaven and eternal life…
>
> May every one of us follow the way shown to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and be lifted to the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom, and may none be stripped of the joy of the future life.[5]

The concept of *theosis* or deification is linked both to the understanding of salvation and personal following of the way of Christ. Theosis can be characterised as an all-powerful and all-sanctifying work of God's grace through the Holy Spirit, possible because of the inborn human ability for transformation. Thus starts the process of the transformation of an individual human being, the whole humanity and even the visible and invisible universe. It is a process when the likeness of God the Father is reflected in His creation through the mediation of the incarnate Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.[6] Archimandrite George argues that theosis is the purpose of human life, being declared in the first chapter of the Bible, 'He [God] does not wish him [a human] simply to be a being with certain gifts, certain qualities, a certain superiority over the rest of creation, He wishes him to be a god by Grace.'[7]

Orthodox theology always considers two aspects of salvation – the positive and the negative. The negative is an indication of being free from the false state of life, which is caused by sin.[8] This is where salvation is understood from the perspective of atonement and forgiveness. The positive aspect of salvation is in sanctification and theosis, which is

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[5] M. N., "Velika Nagrada Vasha na Nebesakh" ["Your Reward in Heaven is Great"], in *Bratskii Vestnik*, Vol. 5 (1985), pp 12-13.

[6] B. Bilaniuk, "The Mystery of Theosis or Divinization," in *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essay in Honor of the Very Reverend Georges Vasilievich Florovsky* (Rome, 1973), p 347. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, "Orthodox Theology in the West: The Reformation," in J. Breck, J. Meyendorff and E. Silk, eds., *The Legacy of St. Vladimir* (Crestwood, NY, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), p 164.

[7] Archimandrite George, *Theosis: The True Purpose of Human Life* (Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios, Mount Athos, 2006), p 19.

[8] Maximos Aghiorgoussis, "The Theology and Experience of Salvation," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 22 (1977), p 406.

emphasised more than a negative one. Hence salvation is not only about forgiveness of sins, but first of all is a renewal of a human being and a restoration of God's image in him,

> …Christ is gradually extended into the believers that they may continue their process of deification, a process that entails both the Spirit's intervention by the operation of divine energies, and their individual effort. Thus salvation is conceived as the culmination of synergy between divine and human, that is, the deification of human beings by divine grace.[9]

The important question is not 'salvation from what,' but 'salvation for what.'[10] It is a mystery of humans reaching perfection through faithfulness, worship and prayer, thus fulfilling God's plan for the universe.[11]

Theosis, therefore, is both the process of transformation and the goal of that process. Since it involves both God and human effort, human striving for perfection, for purification of thoughts, attitudes and actions, Christians are called to a holy way of life. That life must be lived within the Orthodox Church, which by itself becomes of paramount importance, since 'everything in the Church leads to Theosis; the Holy Liturgy, the Mysteries, divine Worship, the Gospel sermon, the fasting; all of these lead to this one thing. The Church alone is the place of Theosis.'[12] Although theosis begins with God, being His gift and something that people cannot achieve by themselves, regardless of their efforts, people have to do their best trying to achieve certain features of character. These are humility, asceticism or rejection of personal desires, and prayer or ability to pray, which is both something to be achieved but also the means by which all these qualities can be obtained.[13] The ideas of theosis, the emphasis on the importance of personal perfection as well as gradual perfection of society could be found not only in the teaching

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[9] Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: an Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster Press, 1999), p 253.

[10] Vitaly Borovoy, "What Is Salvation? An Orthodox Statement," *International Review of Mission*, No. 61 (1972) p 41.

[11] Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p 51.

[12] Archimandrite George, *Theosis*, p 36.

[13] Ibid., pp 45-53.

of the Orthodox church, but they became an often repeated theme in wider literary and socio-political works of the first half of the 19th century in Russia.[14]

Obviously, due to the limitations and a different focus of current research, this is only a brief overview, which mentions some key elements of an important concept for the Orthodox Church. Its meaning for preaching is difficult to overestimate. First of all, preaching (together with other church practices) leads to theosis. Yet, this process happens neither through a logical argumentation, nor by appealing to reason or addressing important moral questions and problems that the listeners have to deal with. Such an approach is seen as 'Western influences' on Orthodox theology and considered deeply misleading and mistaken. Consider the words of Archimandrite George:

> Unfortunately, the spirit of moralism… basing the Christian life on moral improvement, had adversely influenced the piety and spirituality of Christians to a significant degree even here in our land. We often cease to pursue Theosis because of Western influences on our theology… It is often responsible for atheism and for many people's indifference towards the spiritual life, especially among the young.[15]

The following is understood to be a solution – instead of 'moralising,' preaching should lead people to theosis through imparting God's grace, which people can only experience as they give up their individualistic pursuits and selfish ways.[16] Thus, it is first of all the attitude with which people come to participate in a Divine Liturgy and, subsequently, listening to a sermon that enables them to grasp that glimpse of God's Kingdom or be turned further away from it. The listeners, therefore, must enter the act of proclamation (as well as the rest of worship) with humility and reverence.

Such an attitude does not leave any room for critical assessment of the message or parts of it. The absence of experiencing God's grace as a result of participation in the act of worship and preaching, points to the wrong attitude of the worshipper in

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[14] E.g. Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy*, p 26.

[15] Archimandrite George, *Theosis*, p 66.

[16] Ibid., p 71.

the first place and not to the poor quality of preaching. Richard A. Jansen addresses the role of the preacher in 'theotic preaching.' He argues that preachers proclaim the 'law,' if their sermons are directed at the listeners. Instead, preaching should be considered as 'an instrument of divine presence,' which allows Christ to come to the believers. Hence, the focus of preaching is not the change of human hearts or lives, but a mediation of divine agency. 'Preaching of this sort is sacramental in character – a means of grace. It is theosis in action.'[17]

Concluding this overview of the concept of theosis and its impact on understanding and practicing of preaching, the following convictions should be highlighted: God is at work in the act of worship and preaching. His ways aren't always clear - often it is a mystery for the participants. Yet when the worshipper comes with the right heart and mind, in spirit of humility and self-rejection, the Spirit of God is allowed to do His work in the lives and hearts of the congregation, which is the only place where theosis can take place. This brings me to the next important concept – sobornost.

2.2 … walked together with others (Sobornost)

Reaction to the advance and growing popularity of Western philosophical thought gave rise to a movement of Slavophiles, a conservative stream of Russian educated aristocracy, which found its reflection in literature, philosophy, theology and ecclesiology of the Russian Orthodox Church.[18] Some consider it as a beginning of

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[17] Richard A. Jensen, *Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual images in Preaching* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Press, 2005), p 43. At the same time it must be noted that such views of preaching as 'sacramental in character' might not be shared by all the Orthodox theologians. I am grateful to Parush R. Parushev for this comment.

[18] See Parush R. Parushev, 'Romantické vlivy na počatku ruského slavjanofilského hnutí [Romantic Influences at the Beginnings of the Slavophile Movement in Russia],' in Ivana Noble, Jiří Hanuš a kol. *Křesťanství a Romantismus* [Christianity and Romantism], *Quaestiones quodlibetales* series, No. 15 (Praha, Centrum pro Studium Demokrace a Kultury, 2011, in Czech), p 66 (pp. 64-83). Cf. Georges Vasilievich Florovsky, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovia [Ways of Russian Theology]* (Moscow, Institute of Russian Civilization, 2009), p 322 and Ivana Noble, Kateřina Bauerová, Tim Noble and Parush Parushev*, The Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West in the Twentieth Century*, translated from Czech by Tim Noble, Foreword by John Behr (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015, originally published as *Cesty pravoslavné*

indigenous Russian philosophical thought, since in the first half of the 19th century 'philosophy in Russia was a forbidden fruit, being persecuted as something harmful and totally alien' for society.[19] Such reactionary views were opposed by the appearing class of intelligentsia, who believed that in the process of enlightenment of the country newest philosophical thought (primarily German) must be welcomed and embraced.[20] In turn, Ivan Kireyevskii, a philosopher and literary critic, who is considered as one of the co-founders of the Slavophile movement, argued that 'Our [Russian] philosophy must develop from our life,' be connected to the Russian culture, yet embracing 'all the questions of modern education, all the logical truths obtained through science.'[21] Slavophiles, a group of wealthy nobles, representatives of conservative intellectuals, 'came to the conclusion that they need to seek out the ideal for the future development of humanity away from the western rationalism, political liberalism and economic capitalism. Instead, they looked for this ideal in peasant Christian Russia prior to the reforms of the Emperor Peter the Great.'[22] Thus, it was a reaction to overemphasis on reason as a way to solve social problems, and its prevalence over Faith and the Church Tradition, which gave rise to the movement of Slavophiles.[23]

Even though the movement was secular in its essence, with their key thinkers being lay people, the most prominent of whom were Ivan Kireyevskii and Alexey Khomyakov, they supported and affirmed Orthodoxy as an inseparable part of Russian

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teologie ve 20. století na Západ (Praha, Centrum pro studium democracie a kultury, 2012), chapter 2).

[19] Yuri P. Polonskii, *Moi Studencheskie Vospominaniia [My Student Memories]* (Moscow, Prose, 1988) p 364.

[20] C. C. Knorunjii, *Posle Pereriva. Puti Russikoi Filosofii [After the break. The ways of Russian Philosophy]* (St. Petersburg, Alteja, 1994) Part 1.

[21] Ivan V. Kireyevskii, *Polnoie Sobranie Sochinenii [Full Collection of Writings],* Vol. 2 (1911), pp 27, 264, 254.

[22] Parushev, 'Romantické vlivy na počatku ruského slavjanofilského hnutí,' pp 66.

[23] Florovsky, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovia*, pp 328. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, "Philosophical Grounding and Theological Development of the Slavophile Movement in Russia," in *Bogoslovska Misal [Theological Thought]* (Sofia, Bulgaria), No. 3-4, Volume XVI, Thematic volume: "Orthodoxy and Europe – Spiritual Roots and Theological Perspectives" (2012), pp 45-62.

culture, which provided 'spiritual bonding' of the Russian people.[24] According to Parush R. Parushev, for Khomyakov

> Orthodox ecclesiology, with its stress on the authority of the local church as a gathering of the community of the faithful, provided him with the resources to meet the challenge of integrating the two opposing phenomena of freedom and unity… he describes this synthesis in his essay, *The Church is One*, by coining a theological term, *sobornost.'*[25]

In this concept Khomyakov was able to formulate an integral part or even *the essence* of the Orthodox religiosity.[26] 'This one word contains in itself the whole creedal statement.'[27]

Khomyakov believed that God's truth is beyond logical understanding. Moreover, he argued that it was impossible to discover the Truth by reason,[28] since Truth is an object of faith, even though faith is not something that contradicts logic or reason. Human beings possess both rational will and moral freedom, freedom to choose righteousness or sin. Salvation from sin is given by God through Jesus Christ, who unites Himself with those who don't reject Him, with everyone who seeks the truth, which is in the Church. He wrote,

> The unity of the Church is necessary following from the unity of God, since the Church is not the multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but the unity of God's grace, living in the multitude of

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[24] Parushev, 'Romantické vlivy na počatku ruského slavjanofilského hnutí,' p 66.

[25] Parushev, 'Romantické vlivy na počatku ruského slavjanofilského hnutí,' p 66.

[26] I. A. Esaulov, "Sobornost v Filosofii A. S. Khomyakova i Sovremennaia Rossiia" ["Sobornost in Philosophy of A. S. Khomyakov and Modern Russia"], in *A. S. Khomyakov – Mislitel, Poet, Publitsist: Sbornik Statei po Materialam Mezdunarodnoi Nauchnoi Konferentsii, sostoiavscheisia 14-17 aprelia 2004 in Moscow Literary Institute im. A.M. Gorkoro [A.S. Khomyakov – Philosopher, Poet, Publicist: A collection of Articles Based on the Materials of the International Academic Conference, that took place on April 14-17, 2004 in Moscow A. M. Gorky Literary Institute],* Vol. 2 (Moscow, 2007), pp 11-16.

[27] Alexey S. Khomyakov, *Polnoie Sobranie Sochinenii [Full collection of works]*, Vol. 2 (Prague, 1867), p 282.

[28] Florovsky, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovia*, p 350.

> rational creatures, submitting themselves to grace. Grace is also given to the disobedient, refusing to use it (burying their talents), but they are not in the Church. The unity of the Church is not imaginary or allegorical, but true and substantial, such as the unity of many members in a living body…The Church visible or earthly lives in perfect fellowship and unity with all the body of the Church, whose head is Christ. She has Christ in herself and the grace of the Holy Spirit…[29]

The term "sobornost" means a principle, which connects individual human beings into a special body, gathering, or "Sobor." It expresses the idea of unity in plurality, which is more than unity created by common interests or enforced from the outside. In addition, the whole that appears as a result of such unity is more than a sum total of the individuals who combine this whole. It is unity which is possible because of the shared spirituality, and is based on love, and the Church is something which makes such unity possible.[30] This unity is an unavoidable part of Christian faith. Georges V. Florovsky argues that 'nobody can be a Christian by himself, in seclusion, in privacy. To be a Christian means 'to be in the Church'.'[31] Since being outside of the Church, the person is capable to grasp neither the Scripture nor the works of God, yet it becomes possible in the Church, because God's Spirit and God's grace is present there.[32]

Therefore, the role of the church is paramount. The concept of *sobornost* implies that the importance of the Church cannot be stressed enough, since outside of the Church there is no salvation, no place for Scriptural reading or its interpretation. Hence no critique of the Church is even possible,

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[29] Aleksey S. Khomyakov, "Opit Katechezicheskogo Izlozheniia Ucheniia o Tserkvi," in *Polnoie Sobraniie Sochinenii*, ["An Example of Catechetical Presentation of the Teaching of the Church" in *Full Collection of Writings]*, Vol. 2, 3rd ed., (Moscow, 1886), p 3.

[30] Pavel Florenskii, "Poniatiie Tserkvi V Sviaschennom Pisanii," in *Bogoslovskiie Trudy*, ["The Concept of the Church in the Holy Scripture" in *Theological Works*], Vol. 12 (Moscow Patriarchy, 1974), pp 81-82.

[31] Georges Vasilievich Florovsky, *Dukhovnie Razmishleniia [Spiritual Reflections],* accessed on 19.05.2010, from http://www.pravbeseda.ru/library/index.php?page=book&id=783.

[32] Khomyakov, "Opit Katechezicheskogo Izlozheniia Ucheniia o Tserkvi," p 7.

> But wisdom, which lives in you, is not given to you as a person, but to you as a member of the Church. It is also given in part, without fully destroying your personal lies. Yet the Church has the fullness of wisdom without a trace of lie. For this reason do not judge the Church, but obey her, so that your wisdom is not taken away from you.
>
> Anyone who seeks the proof of the Church truth shows his doubt and therefore, excludes himself from the church…[33]

Henceforth, individual convictions or opinions have no role in the church. They are dismissed as irrelevant, since faith is not something personal, but a result of corporate experience – it is about being united to Christ.[34] Alexander Popov argues that one of the negative aspects of sobornost is its presupposition of 'complete dilution of individuality inside the sacred congregation.'[35] Dealing with the theme of biblical interpretation in Russian Baptist churches, he offers helpful insight into what sobornost means for preaching and biblical interpretation,

> In preaching, sobornost implies the equality or even the identity of preachers and parishioners. It supposes that preachers are just the mouth of the congregation. In the opinion of Orthodox Christians, a priest's words cannot come into contradiction with the common spirit of the congregation. That is why the proclamations of the preachers, as a rule, are impersonal. For example, they use the pronoun "we" instead of "I". Sobornost implies also an uncritical reception of preaching. The authority of leaders stands above any doctrine or ethical norm. Criticism of the clergy in Orthodoxy is one of the gravest sins.[36]

Let me offer a brief summary of the argument of this section up to this point. According to the understanding of Orthodox theologians, sobornost cannot be properly rationally explained and understood. It is beyond reason. It has to be experienced by being part of the Church through the mystical unity with Christ, since sobornost is not a human

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[33] Ibid., p 8.

[34] Florovsky, *Puti Russkogo Bogoslovia*, p 351.

[35] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 125.

[36] Ibid., p 125.

characteristic, but a quality of God. Thus the doctrine of sobornost is a teaching about the Church that is mystical and invisible, the Church as a mystical Body of Christ. Such understanding highlights the mystical nature of the sacraments, understood as acts which are exclusively in the Church and for the Church. And since the Church is a reality, which is beyond rational understanding, these events may have no connection to the rational world, nor do they require rational understanding.[37] Although preaching is not present in the traditionaly accepted list of sacraments,[38] some Orthodox theologians still perceive it as sacramental in character, particularly, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, or priesthood.[39] Therefore, God continues to work through the act of preaching regardless of its rhetorical value – God's work is a mystery, which happens through the act itself. This brings me to the last element of my brief review of the Orthodox context – its preaching.

2.3 Preaching in the Russian Orthodox Church

The subject of preaching in the Russian Orthodox Church has attracted a lot of attention from both secular and religious authors, covering a wide spectrum of aspects from the overview of its development through history to the analysis of preaching as a particular genre of public speech. Obviously, it is impossible and unnecessary to address all those issues here. Hence, I will concentrate on a particular period in the development of preaching (late 19th, early 20th century), which will provide a helpful insight into the context in which first Russian baptistic communities were being shaped.

There were two main approaches to preaching in the Orthodox Church. The rhetorical approach emphasized practical methods of conviction and persuasion. It was developed at the end of the 17th century by Archimandrit Ioannikii Gol'atovskii and later by Bishop Fiofan Prokopovich.[40] The followers of this homiletical school believed

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[37] Knorunjii, *Posle Pereriva*, p. 6. See also Khomyakov, *Polnoie Sobraniie Sochinenii,* Vol. 2, p 115.

[38] Although there is no list of sacraments that is universally recognised by various Orthodox Churches, the generally accepted list includes Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, Marriage, Holy Orders, Anointing of the sick. (e.g. "Tainstva, Bogosluzheniie, Ustroistvo Khrama" [Sacraments, Liturgy, Temple Settings] accessed on 01.06.2015 from https://mospat.ru/archive/page/vera-i-zhizn/bogoslujenie.html).

[39] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika [Priest's Handbook]*, Vol. 5, (Moscow, Izdatelstvo Moskovskoi Patriarkhii, 1986), p 9.

[40] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 7-8.

teaching people Christian faith and persuading them to change their lives can be done through rhetorical devices and convincing argumentation.[41]

In 1846 professor I. K. Amphiteatrov from Kiev Theological Seminary published an extensive work on homiletics. In his book he rejected the idea that preaching was a form of rhetoric. Rather, the main task of homiletics was to define the conditions that would allow the appearance of the true sermon, thus shifting the focus from the sermon to the 'soul of the preacher.'[42] In this approach, preaching is understood as embodiment of God's energy, which is given to the preacher/priest, who then transmits it to the listeners. Thus, preaching is, first of all, the work of God, the result of God's grace. The gift of preaching is given through priesthood.[43]

Such an approach rejects rhetoric, since God's Word does not need human constructs to be made more convincing.[44] 'Spiritual word… can convince the obedient ones without aid of rhetoric or grammar…' [45] This approach, also known as anti-rhetorical or charismatic was prevalent in the Orthodox Church in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Although there were several attempts to combine the two approaches, the task is still viewed as incomplete and requiring further work.[46]

Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika [The Priest's Handbook] offers the following interpretation of charismatic preaching,

> Apostolic preaching was not just continuation of preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the very word of the Saviour proclaimed through the disciples. The centre of the apostles' preaching was the testimony of the

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[41] Olga A. Prokhvatilova, *Pravoslavnaia Propoved i Molitva Kak Fenomen Sovremennoi Zvuchaschei Rechi [Orthodox Preaching and Prayer as a Phenomenon of Contemporary Speech]* (Volgograd, Volgogradskii Gosudarstvennii Universitet, 1999), p 127.

[42] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 8.

[43] Ibid., p 9. Cf. Prokhvatilova, *Pravoslavnaia Propoved*, p 127.

[44] Prokhvatilova, *Pravoslavnaia Propoved*, p 127.

[45] Efrem Sirin, *Tvoreniia Izhe Vo Sviatikh Ottsa Nashego Efima Sirina [Creations of Our Holy Father Efim Sirin]* (Moscow, 1881) Vol. 2, p 120, quoted after Prokhvatilova, *Pravoslavnaia Propoved*, p 127.

[46] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 9.

> Truth, embodied in the Crucified Christ (1 Cor. 23), Resurrected and Redeeming the world… Preaching of the apostles became a special ministry, "the ministry of the word" (Acts. 6,4; Eph. 3,7) for which the Lord Jesus Christ gave the apostles the Grace of the Holy Spirit and His co-presence (Acts 1,8; Matthew 28,20, and others). That is why apostolic preaching is "not in convincing words of human wisdom, but in the appearance of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor. 2,4). This is the foundation of its full success.[47]

Although the preaching of the Apostles is seen as an ideal, yet it is recognised that such an ideal is impossible to achieve, since no one can achieve the knowledge of the Apostles and their closeness to God. This brings a problem of proclaiming one's views and not God's Word. The solution is seen as two-fold. First is the need for the preacher to reject his own will in everything, allowing the Truth to act in his and through his life. The second is the role of the Church and its teaching, which serves as a guardian of the sound teaching and protects preaching from heresies.[48]

Olga Prokhvatilova[49] defines several main characteristic features of preaching. First, preaching is God-inspired, 'since the Word is self-expressed through preaching.' This mystical process of incarnation of the Word into a human language can allow space for rhetoric. Yet the weakness and inadequacy of human words cannot thwart God's purposes, which will be achieved regardless of the quality of the presentation – after all, God Himself is at work in preaching. The second characteristic is the co-existence of the two worlds, the Divine and human. The Creator reveals Himself through the proclaimed word to a human being, the listener. Thirdly, preaching brings salvation, since it brings people in contact with the Truth, which is Christ and His word. Such an encounter results in listeners gaining greater knowledge about God, but also brings moral and spiritual growth, causing repentance and purification. Finally, preaching is an expression of *sobornost,* as it is directed at a gathering of

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[47] Ibid., p 12.

[48] Ibid., p 13.

[49] Dr. Olga Prokhvatilova is a professor of Volgograd State University. One of the leading specialists in the area of preaching in Russian Orthodox Church.

individual Christians, who, whilst maintaining their individuality, are united as listeners of the word. The power of spiritual unity with other believers gathered in the temple and with Christ enables the listeners to perceive and experience the Truth during the sermon.[50]

The strong conviction that Christ himself is present in preaching, which is His words being proclaimed, bears certain implications for the preachers as they prepare the message. The priest/preacher must come into the worship having spent time in repentance and prayer, which teaches to fight sin and to observe God through prayerful reflection. This, and regular participation in the liturgical life of the church, allows God's gracious powers to work in the preacher's mind, helping him to understand the Truth.[51] This is a required preparation for a sermon.[52] The content of a message therefore is less important – the right heart is the key. Consider the following words about the preaching of Metropolitan Filaret,

> When people listened to him, they listened very intensely. Yet they could not understand the words of the preacher, and only heard the sound of his voice and felt the look of his eyes.
>
> It was enough to feed their spirit with the spirit of the great elder.
>
> This is the power of the spirit-led preaching. In it the spirit of the preacher immediately works on the listener's spirit.[53]

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[50] Prokhvatilova, *Pravoslavnaia Propoved*, pp 145-147.

[51] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 14.

[52] A lot more can be said on the spirituality of the preacher, which is deliberately omitted due to the limitations of this work. In addition to the already mentioned spiritual preparation, there is a heavy emphasis on the need for the preacher to both understand the Truth, which is proclaimed, but also to experience it. For the preacher to experience the Truth means to show obvious gifts of the Spirit in his life, such as love, joy, peace, perseverance, grace, mercy, faith, humbleness and self-control. Unless the preacher exhibits such gifts in his life, his sermon becomes a mere theoretical reflection or human contemplation on the Word. (*Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 15).

[53] A. Vetelev, *Istoriia Propovednichestva Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi: Uchebnoie Posobie Dlia Studentov 4-go Klassa [The History of Preaching of Russian Orthodox Church: Study Guide for 4th Year Students]* (Sergiev Posad, Moskovskaia Dukhovnaia Seminariia, 2006), pp 84.

Henceforth, it is argued that preaching must be improvised or extemporaneous, allowing the Spirit to speak. 'It is a living word because the word of God is applied to the condition of the listeners and is made contemporary for them, understandable for everyone. It is a living word also by the appearance, as a living message from the heart, free of any affectation.'[54] Therefore, an improvised, unprepared sermon, proclaimed in the power of the Spirit is capable of bringing the Word of God to the people, allowing them to participate in the act of God's revelation.[55]

Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika names preaching 'a culmination of the Divine Liturgy,' which is directed outwardly. The role of proclamation is to carry saving truth to the hearts of the worshippers. Preaching has such an important place, that some of Orthodox theologians conclude that preaching by itself is a gift of grace, which priests receive at ordination. Thus, preaching differs from other genres of public speaking. Unlike rhetoric directed at the minds of the listeners (not their hearts), preaching reflects 'the experiencing of God's Truth in the soul of the preacher (at that very moment!).'[56]

To sum up, it can be said that Russian Orthodox understanding and practice of preaching differs substantially from the paradigm offered in the majority of preaching text-books written by homilets from baptistic or the wider protestant tradition.[57] In the Orthodox Church, preaching is seen as a transmission not only of

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[54] M. Tareev, *Po Voprosam Gomiletiki: Kriticheskie Ocherki [On the Questions of Homiletics: Critical Essays]* (Sergiev Posad, Troitsko-Sergieva Lavra, 1903), p 11.

[55] Even today, extemporaneous preaching is considered as superior to the message prepared in advance. *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika* says that, for someone who only begins to preach, he is allowed to use the manuscript, since it helps to overcome anxiety. The next step for a preacher is to memorise the sermon, thus avoiding using the written text. However, either of these approaches robs preaching of its potential power. Thus, it is recommended, that he prepares an outline and memorises it, which shifts the focus to proclamation, rather than preparation.

Nonetheless, all of the above is only a preparation to fully improvised preaching. Only the main idea needs to be prepared in advance. 'All the work of transmitting the spiritual riches of the preacher into the living word happens in the temple, during the preaching event.' (*Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, pp 24). Cf. Archbishop Amvrosii, *Zhivoie Slovo [Living Word] (*Kharkov, 1903), p 80.

[56] *Nastol'naia Kniga Sviashchennika*, Vol. 5, p 15.

[57] E.g. David M. Brown, *Transformational Preaching* (Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2003); David Buttrick, *Homiletics : Moves and Structures*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1987); D.

God's words, but also as a channel of God's saving grace. Therefore, even when the message does not contain a coherent structure, theological depth or any relevance for the listeners, it can still be seen as successful. If the preacher's spiritual condition is right, God will deliver the necessary meaning into the hearts, minds, and lives of the listeners.

Conclusion

The complex, multi-origin nature of the birth and development of the baptistic movement in the Russian Empire meant the absence of a coherent theological framework within which these communities of nonconformists appeared. Few of their first leaders had any theological education. Therefore, considering the dominant Orthodox theological background and the extent to which Orthodox convictions and practices penetrated every sphere of Russian culture, it would be wrong to assume that baptistic groups were capable of separating themselves from it. They were bound to absorb major Orthodox convictions – not the visible practices, like infant baptism or veneration of icons – these were easy targets for baptistic critique. However, more complex theological convictions underlying views on salvation, holiness, etc., were absorbed by baptistic Christians, who believed that they followed the "biblical way," being assumed as their own, rather than borrowed.

I have offered an insight into such major Orthodox theological concepts as *theosis* and *sobornost*, their meaning for worship, and, particularly, for preaching. The anti-rhetoric or charismatic preaching, which dominated Orthodox pulpits at a time, when the first baptistic groups appeared on the religious stage of the Russian Empire, have produced a major imprint on their understanding and practice of preaching. This will become obvious in the following chapters, 3 and 4, where I am going to turn to the question of the development of the art of proclamation amongst Russian baptistic Christians, beginning from their first communities at the end of the 19th century, until late 1980-s, the time of Perestroika. Then I will turn to the contemporary state of the practice.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1971); Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2003); John Kilinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2nd Revised Edition, 1996); Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1985), etc.

CHAPTER 3. Development of Russian Baptist preaching in the 19th and 20th centuries

Introduction

An attempt to study the development of preaching among baptistic[1] Christians in Russia is bound to face difficulties. Firstly, it is nearly impossible to rely on primary sources – the texts of the sermons.[2] There are several reasons for this. One is that Russian society has always been (and still is) predominantly a culture of oral communication, therefore, writing manuscripts has never been a custom for preachers, most of whom were illiterate at the early stages of the development of the movement. Secondly, the tradition of charismatic preaching widely practiced in the Orthodox Church, and reviewed in Chapter 2, has made a significant impact on baptistic tradition, emphasising the importance of spontaneous, extemporaneous preaching without the use of the written manuscript. Thirdly, Baptists and other dissenters from the Orthodox Church were experiencing constant persecutions both under the tsarist government and the communistic regime, which is responsible for the destruction of those documents collected in the archives of various local churches and individuals.

However, the project is not a hopeless one. There are number of sources that can be used for such study depending on historical period. All available materials can be divided into two categories. Firstly, a variety of resources originated from baptistic groups that include publications in major magazines of Baptists and Evangelical

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[1] Apart from the development of the ministry of proclamation in churches of the RUECB, the historical overview in this chapter focuses on Stundist communities as well as churches of Evangelical Christians prior to the formation of the AUCECB, therefore I refer to these ecclesial groups as 'baptists' or 'baptistic' (using small 'b').

[2] It is possible to study the texts of sermons of some prominent baptist leaders, which were recorded and some of them published on the pages of the *Khristianin, Baptist, Bratskii Vestnik*, and other journals. This, however, does not solve a problem of lack of textual examples of sermons of the vast majority of regular preachers, since the majority of churches did not keep any records of what was being said or preached from their pulpits.

At the same time, even such a project might not be an impossible one. Due to almost total absence of written or published materials (during Soviet persecutions), it became customary for many people to take (unofficial) notes during the sermons. Some of them still keep (or have inherited from their grandparents) archives of note-pads full of sermon summaries and even full-texts of the messages they've heard. This, however, is not the prime focus of this study, therefore will be left as an opportunity for further research.

Christians (first of all *Baptist* and *Khristianin*) and newspapers from the beginning of the 20th century, a number of books written in the second half of the 20th century and some articles in the *BV*, as well as books, articles and dissertations that appeared in recent years, covering various areas of Russian Baptist worship, hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and finally a number of surveys gathered in several Baptist churches in Voronezh, Russia.

Apart from the sources coming from the baptistic circles, there are publications from their "opponents" – critical, sometimes even hostile books and articles produced by the Orthodox authors, particularly at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Several books appeared during the communistic period, written as a part of state battle with religious faith. Some of them lack any academic value, being examples of overt atheistic propaganda. Yet a number of these publications contain serious and fairly objective observations and reflections on baptistic life and worship. I will refer to these sources later in this Chapter.

For the purposes of current research, it is helpful to divide the history of the baptistic movement in Russia into four periods. The first is the formative years (approximately from 1862 to 1905) from the appearance of the first known baptistic groups until the Revolution of 1905 and the Edict of Religious Toleration (April, 1905) that allowed Russian citizens to leave the Orthodox Church.[3] I will show the significance of that period, as even today the churches follow a number of patterns in worship and preaching, which were inherited from a format of a Stundist Bible-study. The second period begins with a liberating law of 1905. The relative freedom that non-Orthodox Christians received at this stage, coupled with changes in the political sphere, and aspirations for more democratic re-shaping of the state, brought forward the need in developing a more pragmatic, professional approach to preaching and ministerial training. For Baptists and Evangelical Christians it was a period of fast growth and expansion, which ended with active persecution of

[3] It must be noted that despite greater religious freedom for non-Orthodox believers that came with the Edict of Religious Toleration, various restrictions and limitation were kept. For example, it was still prohibited to proselytise. Nonetheless, this did not restrict members of the baptistic communities in Russia in their missionary work. In a very short period from 1905 until 1912, their numbers grew by 30%, reaching over 60 thousands of active believers. (Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, p 27)

Christians by the Communistic authorities. The law from April 8, 1929 "About Religious Organisations" allowed free preaching only to the newly established religion – atheism.[4] The third period, which will be addressed in Chapter 4, covers a wide epoch from the beginning of persecutions until the end of the oppressive era during Mikhail Gorbachov's perestroika (1989). The policies of militant atheism, which was later developed into "scientific atheism," severe persecution from the communistic regime (which included killings of thousands of Christians), and an impossibility to develop educational institutions or even receive advanced secular education for the believers resulted in the decrease of the value of education in the eyes of both church leaders and ordinary Christians and over-spiritualization of preaching as a practice, with spirituality of the preacher becoming more important than the message proclaimed by that person. Finally, the fourth period is modern history (1989-current time), which I will review in Chapter 5.

Throughout all the stages of their history, Russian baptistic churches had to deal with the process of contextualization of their message and practices: at the beginning they were learning to cope with the Bible instead of the Tradition as the main source for their life and faith. Emphasis on personal ethics and highly critical views of the Orthodox clergy was important to justify the dissent. Freedom (2nd period) brought new challenges – learning to be more open to the newcomers, challenges of preparation and training of the new missionaries and ministers, and theological questions of unity in a context of a growing number of self-taught and "home-grown" teachers and preachers. Communistic oppression (3rd period) at an unprecedented scale raised a question of survival. Spiritual formation, personal holiness, faithfulness to the calling and total reliance on God came to the forefront. A new period of openness and freedom (4th period) to a degree of anarchy, which neither church nor society has ever experienced, mounted the biggest contemporary challenge to the Church – how to make its message relevant not only to the new-comers, but also to its

[4] Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol. 2, p 117. On Marxism as religion in relationship to Christianity, see Parush R. Parushev, "Marxism and Christianity," in Tim Noble, Tim Grass, Martin Davie, John McDowell and Steven Holmes, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology*, revised (Nottingham, England/ Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, forthcoming).

long-standing members. This highlights the growing need of identifying the core convictions, the constants of the baptistic identity and learning to preserve those constants, thus freeing the church from the constraints of less significant elements of the communal life and worship, which therefore, could be dropped without fear of compromising its identity.

3.1 Formative years

The first 35 years of the baptistic movement in the Russian Empire is a significant period, which is almost impossible to cover in a short overview. As it has been shown through my narrative up to this point, there was a vast variety of situations where churches appeared and grew, from small communities of peasants in Ukrainian villages, Baptist churches in Tiflis (nowadays Tbilisi, Georgia), to the meetings in the palaces of high aristocracy in St Petersburg. Multitudes of people were the driving force behind the spread and growth of the movement. Michail Ratushnii, Ivan Ryaboshapka, Vasilii Pashkov, Modest Korf,[5] Nikita Voronin, and Ivan Kargel[6] were just a few amongst countless evangelists, preachers, and teachers. Finally, the fascinating journey that baptistic communities in Russia have made, developing from small Bible-study groups to full functional organizations that attempted to form a Union to coordinate their mission and ministry. The complexity of all these circumstances might be a sufficient reason to give up even an attempt to characterise the ministry of proclamation at this stage.

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[5] Count Modest Korf was born in a wealthy aristocratic family that played an important role in Russia's politics. He became interested in evangelical Christianity at the age of 24, through a meeting with a representative of a British Bible Society, which eventually led to his conversion through the preaching of Lord Radstock in 1874. A close friend of Pashkov, he became a prominent leader of Evangelical Christians, as well as provided support for Stundist communities in the south of the Russian Empire. He was exiled together with Pashkov in 1884. (*Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR [The History of the Evangelical Christians-baptists in the USSR]* (Moscow, VSEKHB, 1989), pp 81-82).

[6] Ivan or Johann Kargel is one of the most prominent leaders of the Russian baptistic movement. Born in a family of German colonists in Georgia, Kargel became an Evangelical Christian through Pashkov, and after his exile from Russia in 1884 became a pastor of the St. Petersburg congregation of Evangelical Christians. As noted by Gregory Nichols, 'His writings and teaching… helped to shape the Russian evangelical movement and Russian Baptist expressions of evangelical spirituality.' (*The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V Kargel (1849-1937)* (Oregon, Pickwick, 2011), pp 1).

However, such an attempt is worth making. Baptists themselves produced little written material on their theology and almost nothing on their practices, and particularly, practices of worship, being preoccupied with positioning themselves on a religious map of the Empire, then with survival, at the same time trying to bring some structure to their communal life and faith, as well as fuelling their missionary efforts. Nonetheless, there are various other historical material regarding the first baptistic groups in Russia that allow gathering enough data to form a grounded understanding of their preaching. Books, articles and reports written by Orthodox scholars, reporters and even police officers create a significant pool of information about baptistic worship practices at the end of the 19th century. Whilst a lot of them have little historical value, apart from being another indicator of hostility that the state-supported Church had towards any non-conformity, some offer a genuine attempt to study a new, and at times, controversial phenomenon on the Russian religious scene; these sources will be referred to in the following pages.

Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism [Southern Russian Stundism], a work of priest Arsenii Rozhdestvenskii provides a number of descriptions of Stundist worship practices. The lack of data regarding the historical development of Stundist worship makes him concentrate on their contemporary worship (the book was published in 1889, less than 30 years after the appearance of the first known Ukrainian Stundist group), focusing at several major areas, such as religious songs, preaching and prayer.[7] He describes it as follows:

> Having gathered at someone's home, Stundists sit at the benches, and one of them is 'chairing the gathering.'[8] This person sits at a table facing the rest of the congregation. He opens the New Testament or the Bible and interprets every verse. After the reading of the New Testament or the Bible there are various contemplations, often polemical in nature. Then they open another book… One person reads the first verse of some spiritual song, if the meaning of anything is unclear, it is explained first, than the

[7] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism*, p 243.

[8] It might be interesting to note that this word "gathering," that was used by Rozhdestvenskii in relation to the "worship," is the same word that has been used by Baptists in Russia both in reference to the worship service and to the church. For example, when saying 'let's go to church,' people normally say, 'let's go to the gathering' ['poidem v sobraniie'].

> rest of the congregation sing the verse altogether. Then they sing another verse, and another. Then they kneel and one of the Stundists offers a passionate extemporaneous prayer, often with tears in his eyes.[9]

Rozhdestvenskii refers to an even older account from the newspaper *Pravda [Truth]* from 1878, which describes the service in a similar way: An opening prayer, followed by a hymn, another improvised prayer and a sermon. 'A sermon consisted of the preacher's reading and offering his explanation of the parable about 10 virgins. The sermon was ended with an invitation to the brothers to offer another interpretation, if anyone had one. That was followed by a prayer.' Then followed another hymn, and another sermon, which again consisted of verse by verse explanation by the preacher. Another hymn and prayer took place before the service was concluded with 'greetings', where brothers kissed each other and shook hands with sisters.[10] Anyone who has ever witnessed a Russian Baptist service would immediately notice how little it had changed since 1878.

Describing the sermon as a verse by verse interpretation of the Scripture by the person who leads the service, Sergei Margaritov adds that once the preacher finished his sermon, other people were allowed to speak on the subject. They could share their thoughts even if they disagreed with the main speaker.[11] The meetings of the Pashkovites, later known as Evangelical Christians, were marked by similar characteristic features – extemporaneous prayers, Christian hymns (both of Orthodox and non-Orthodox origin) and, of course, a sermon or several sermons. Justification by faith, forgiveness because of Jesus' sacrifice – these were some of the major themes of these sermons. Both men and women could preach.[12]

Such a description of early Russian baptistic worship highlights the centrality of oral biblical interpretation in these communities of believers. With their education limited to the ability to read and write, "Chitai kak napisano" or "Read as it is written"

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[9] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism,* p 251.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Margaritov, *Istoriia Russkikh Misticheskikh i Ratsionalisticheskikh Sect,* p 166.

[12] Ibid., p 211.

was the main hermeneutical principle for those interpreters.[13] The Bible (the only book that was considered sacred) was read and interpreted as a book written directly for them.[14] Ivan Kushnev, a Russian Orthodox priest from Orel, whilst been very critical of any dissenters from the Orthodoxy, accusing them of betrayal not only of their faith, but also of the country, notes that although Stundists did not have a theological system, their reading and learning of the Scripture (in most cases without any guidance from trained theologians) produced stunning results in their moral living – they did not drink alcohol, never used tobacco, did not swear, lived highly moral lives in family and business environments.[15] The entry into a church was through public repentance of one's sins, transformed life and confession of Christ as their Saviour. Stundists insisted that the Bible, being the Word of God contained everything that was needed for salvation. Every Christian was given God's grace that enabled him/her to read and understand the Bible.[16]

Rozhdestvenskii provides a thorough analysis of Stundist and Baptist teaching from an Orthodox perspective. He points to the use of the Bible as a sole book, which these groups considered authoritative (rejecting the Orthodox Tradition). Attempts to build their worship practices solely on biblical foundation widened the gap between the non-conformists and the Orthodoxy. Understanding prayer as a Spirit-led activity, caused their rejection of pre-recorded prayers and books of prayers. In a similar way ministry (of all sorts, including preaching and teaching) was seen as a task of every

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[13] This argument about illiteracy of many baptistic preachers isn't applicable to many followers of Pashkov, who were highly educated nobles. However, most of them did not receive any formal theological training, thus their main hermeneutical approach, literal interpretation, was the same.

[14] The fact that baptistic Christians insisted on the necessity of individual reading and interpretation of the Bible, as well as rejection of the Tradition of the Orthodox Church has always been condemned by the Orthodox writers and clergy (e.g. I. Aiazov, *O Slove Bozhiem Ili Ob Istochnikakh Khristianskogo Verouchenija (V Oblicheniie Russkikh Sectantov) [About the Word of God or About the Sources of Christian Doctrine (In Denunciation of Russian Sectarians)]* (St Petersburg, 1914)). Even today, the question of who has the right to read and interpret the Scripture remains a divisive issue between these Christian traditions.

[15] Ivan A. Kushnev, *Nemetskiie Very [German Faiths]* (Orel, Tipographia A.A. Logunova, 1916), p 11.

[16] Ibid.*,* p 25. Cf. Aiazov wrote about Stundists' heavy reliance on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in matters of biblical interpretation, thus rejecting any need of theological training (*O Slove Bozhiem,* p 57).

Christian rather than a chosen few (priests in the Orthodox Church). Conversion, repentance and expectations of Christ's return became prominent themes in the teaching of these new churches.[17]

Finally, a lot of Stundist and Baptist preaching contained criticism of the Orthodox Church, its worship practices (such as veneration of icons, observation of traditions, and others), and Orthodox priests, whose life was seen as contradictory to the teaching of Christ.[18] Ivan S. Prokhanov[19] wrote in his autobiography,

> In the Orthodox Church they only had pompous rituals, where the priests took part as hirelings. People did not understand anything that was part of the worship service. And only the Bible, which they accepted was precious for people, as it taught Christians… and they organised their meetings with simple faith and knowledge of Christ.
>
> "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among you." At these services everyone felt that they were children of one Father, brothers of one great Teacher. And everyone, who attended these services trusted each other and the world of God, and prayed, and had spiritual fellowship. These meetings were beginning of revelation for the ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church, because they were pointing to a new concept of a church…[20]

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[17] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism,* Part 2.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov was one of the most prominent leaders of the Evangelical Christians in Russia. Prokhanov was born in a Molokan family in Vladikavkaz (North Caucasus). In 1887 he joined a Baptist church. In the following years he studied theology in various schools in England, Germany and France. After his return to Russia in 1898 he became actively involved in various ministries of Evangelical Christians. He became a leader of the movement, and is known for his numerous educational programmes, publishing activities and a grand vision for the baptistic believers to bring about transformation of Russia. I offer a more in-depth overview of Prokhanov's ministry in section 3.3 *Big dreams and dashed hopes: 1905-1929.* (See also Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Study of Their Identity and Theology During the Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods;* Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii*).

[20] Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii*, pp 57-58.

Several points highlighted by Rozhdestvenskii were to be expected at the beginning of a new movement with passion for reformation of the existing established Church. The discovery of the biblical message and particularly its ethical teaching, as well as dissatisfaction with the existing order of social and ecclesial life caused dissent.[21] Prosecution by the police, fuelled by the established Church widened the split, and highlighted the need to justify the separation, which was seen as a loss by the Orthodox Church of the "true and narrow way." At the end of the 19th century Nicolay Leskov wrote about a split that occurred between the followers of Lord Radstock and the Orthodox Church, 'Everything from start to finish boiled down to one point: the Russian Church was formalistic and lifeless, and they had "taken against it."'[22] Prokhanov pointed to the lack of biblical teaching in the Orthodox Church, addressing the invitation of Lord Radstock, whose preaching became a starting point for Pashkov's conversion, and the appearance of the Evangelical Christians,

> Lady Chertkova started to seek, what was this living power that was opening in the Bible that could make human souls happy. First of all, she spoke with prominent ministers from the Orthodox Church. Of course, they could not satisfy her. Then she left Russia and started to visit famous preachers in other countries.[23]

Thus the rejection of the Tradition (the writings of the Holy Fathers, and liturgical worship), seen as deviation from the clear biblical message. Instead, baptistic communities offered a focus on repentance and holy, sinless living,[24] which quickly became the marks of the new movement.

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[21] E.g. Polunov draws a bleak picture of moral state of Russian society and Orthodox clergy in the second half of the 19th century. ("Church, Regime, and Society in Russia (1880-1895)," pp 33–53).

[22] Nicolay Leskov, *Schism in High Society:* Lord *Radstock and His Followers,* Translated by James Yeoman Muckle (Nottingham, Bramcote, 1995), pp 100-101 (The original was published in Russian under the title, *Velikosvetskii Raskol. Lord Radstock i Ego Posledovateli [The Schism in High Society. Lord Radstock and His Followers]* (St. Petersburg, V Tushnov, 1877).

[23] *V Kotle Rossii*, p 56.

[24] Although I have already addressed the importance of the Orthodox theological and ecclesial context, it might be necessary to mention that themes of repentance, prayer and holy living,

Obviously, a wave of evangelical groups needed some coherence in teaching and practice. In April 1884 Vasilii Pashkov tried to organise a conference which was supposed to bring together representatives from the baptistic communities from all across the Russian Empire (the police had forcefully stopped the meetings). The agenda included questions on the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and Ordination. As Puzynin noted, 'Pashkov believed that when the Bible is read in a spirit of mutual love, then the community of people from various backgrounds will inevitably come to a common understanding of Scripture on all the question.'[25]

Despite the opposition of the authorities, at the end of the same month another meeting was held in Novo-Vasilievka, a little Ukrainian village. It was 'the first Russian

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which became very prominent in baptistic ecclesiology, were not an exclusively baptistic concept. For example, G. P. Fedotov noticed that repentance was of extreme importance in the Orthodox tradition, whilst tears during repentance were seen as confirmation of its integrity. He also pointed out that a moral way of life was seen as more important for salvation than 'sacramental sanctification.' (*The Russian Religious Mind (I): Kievan Christianity. The 10th to the 13th Centuries,* Vol.3, (Belmont, Massachusetts, Nordland Publishing, 1975), pp 382-389). Addressing some of these issues Miriam R. Kuznetsova wrote, 'If the author had to choose one word to describe the religious aspirations of the soul of Russian Christians, the word would be blagochestie "piety".' ("Early Russian Evangelicals (1974-1929): Historical Background and Hermeneutical Tendencies Based on I. V. Kargel's Written Heritage," PhD Dissertation (University of Pretoria, 2009), p 57).

Another important source of convictions that, in many ways, gave shape to the baptistic movement, were Molokans, an indigenous Russian evangelical movement that appeared in the late 18th century. The Bible was the basis for their worship services and practical living. They viewed it as a guide to salvation, which prompted serious prayerful study of the Word (Marina S. Karetnikova, ed., *Al'manakh Po Istorii Russkogo Baptisma: Russkoie Bogoiskatelstvo [Almanac on the History of Russian Baptists: Russian Search for God]*, v. 1, (St. Petersburg, Biblia Dlya Vsekh, 1999), p 72). They rejected the authority or hierarchy within the church, believing that every member of the congregation had a right to read and interpret the Bible both in their private life and in corporate worship (H. Brandenburg, *The Meek and The Mighty: The Emergence of the Evangelical Movement in Russia* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), p 62). Molokans practiced public repentance. They followed very strict moral rules: drinking, smoking, swearing, playing cards, dancing – all of it was prohibited. (N. Kuterov, *Kratkaia Istoriia i Veroucheniie Russkikh Ratsionalisticheskikh i Misticheskikh Eresei [Short History and Beliefs of Russian Rationalistic and Mystical Heresies]* (Moscow, 1891) p 33). Thousands of Molokans eventually joined Baptist Churches and communities of Evangelical Christians.

[25] This understanding eventually changed, as Pashkov came to the conclusion that unity did not exclude diversity of interpretation. (Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, p 91).

conference of the Union of Believers, baptised Christians, or as they are called, Baptists, of South Russia and the Caucasus.' This meeting is considered by many historians as a starting point in the history of the Russian Baptist Union.[26] The letter written by Ivan Kargel to Pashkov (who didn't attend the conference, being in exile) provides a summary of that meeting, highlighting biblical interpretation and application as the burning issues. Practical questions related to marriage and divorce, ordination, communion and spiritual gifts were directly linked to the teaching of the Bible. Concluding remarks of this letter are of extreme importance. It was decided that concerning 'decisions dealing with theological questions... there may exist difference of opinion. It is seen appropriate to seek unanimous acceptance of decisions, but congregations are to be given the right to decide as they see fit to do before God.' [27]

At this stage, it might be helpful to offer a short summary of my argument so far. The practice of reading the Bible in the community of believers and using it as a guide for the daily living played an extremely important role in the appearance of the evangelical movement in Russia in the second half of the 19th century. Such communal reading and interpretation was done in the most simplistic fashion – someone read the passage from the Bible, tried to explain it to the listeners and shared some of his/her thoughts on it. The interpretation was discussed communally. The Bible was seen as a book written directly for them. Its meaning was understood literally. Moreover, it was considered as the only authoritative book for Christians to live by. Such an approach inevitably placed the roots of the Russian baptistic primary theology and ecclesiology in the nest of the Orthodox Church, absorbing its notions of holiness, repentance, importance of prayer, and believing community. At the same time, such immediacy in relation to the Scripture, brought different (from that of the Orthodox Church) understanding of authority and spirituality,

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[26] Apart from making important decisions related to the life of the union, the delegates appointed Johann Wieler as a president of the union. At this stage, growing links to German, English and later American Baptists played an important role in shaping the structure of the congregations, and in developing their common theological stance. (For more information on these important themes see Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* chapter 5; Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians;* Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution,* Chapter 1).

[27] Lawrence Klippenste, "Russian Evangelicalism Revisited: Ivan Kargel and the Founding of the Russian Baptist Union", in *Baptist History and Heritage* (April, 1992), pp 43-46.

thus causing this initially revisionist movement within the Orthodox Church to separate and look elsewhere for assistance as it continued to grow and develop.

3.2 Biblical interpretation

This brings me to the question of biblical interpretation amongst various baptistic groups in Russia. In recent years the subject of Russian baptistic hermeneutics received a substantial amount of scholarly attention. Among them are Miriam R. Kuznetsova's PhD dissertation "Early Russian Evangelicals (1974-1929): Historical Background and Hermeneutical Tendencies Based on I.V. Kargel's Written Heritage"; Andrey Puzynin's book *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*: *A Study of Their Identity and Theology During the Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods*; A. Popov's PhD dissertation "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as Hermeneutical Community: Examining the Identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) Through the Way the Bible Was Used in its Publications"; and Gregory L Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V Kargel (1849-1937)* (Oregon, Pickwick, 2011). All of them deal with various aspects of biblical interpretation in Russian baptistic churches.

I have already touched upon the practices of reading the Bible among the Stundists and addressed a number of important Orthodox concepts that produced a significant impact on the way Baptists in Russia understood and practiced their faith. Now I would like to focus primarily on "western influences," on some of the most significant convictions that were shaped with the help of German and English evangelical Christians.

Baptists

Baptists were the only group within the Russian baptistic movement that 'had from the beginning a definite denominational character.'[28] Its starting point is considered to be the baptism of a Molokan leader Nikita Voronin in August 20, 1867 (despite the fact that some Stundist groups practiced baptism by immersion few years prior to that) in Tiflis.[29]

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[28] Brandenburg, *The Meek and The Mighty*, p xii.

[29] Alexander V. Karev, "Russkoie Evangelsko-Baptistskoie Dvizheniie [Russian Evangelical – Baptist Movement]," in Karetnikova, *Al'manakh Po Istorii Russkogo Baptisma*, p 93.

Voronin was baptised by a German Baptist, Kalweit, who was connected to Oncken. Three years later Voronin was already a presbyter of a church of 78 baptised members.[30] In 1875 the church sent Vasilii Pavlov[31] (who was twenty-years old at that moment) to Hamburg (Germany) to study at the Baptist Seminary, which was organised by Oncken.[32]

The congregation in Tiflis accepted the Hamburg confession of faith, and following a German Baptist lead, developed a number of rules concerning worship practices and church life. Baptism by immersion and strict moral life were prerequisites for a church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper. The roles of the presbyter and the deacons were also adopted.[33] Although theologically Russian Baptists were less diverse than Stundists or Evangelical Christians, having appropriated a number of doctrines and practices from German Baptists, they still did not develop any rigid theological system or creed. Hence, there existed a lot of flexibility in interpreting the Scripture,[34] which was seen as the only authoritative source of Christian teaching. Pavlov wrote about the Bible,

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[30] Ibid., p 110.

[31] Vasilii Pavlov was one of the leaders of the Russian Baptist movement at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. He was born in 1854 in a Molokan family; joined a Baptist church in Tiflis in 1871. In 1875-76 he completed a course in the Baptist seminary in Hamburg. Being ordained for Christian ministry by Oncken, Pavol returned to Russia, where he became a pastor of a church in 1880. Pavlov played an important role in the formation of the Baptist union. He is also known for his missionary efforts, educational work, and publishing activities, including translation of numerous sermons and theological works written by English and German theologians. (for further reading see V. Popov, *Stopi Blagovestnika: Zhizn i Trudi V. G. Pavlova [The Feet of the One who Brings Good News: Life and Work of V. G. Pavlov]* (Moscow, Blagovestnik, 1996))

[32] Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol. 1, p 135.

[33] In this, and a number of other church practices Baptists differed from both Stundists and Evangelical Christians. (Kushnev, *Nemetskiie Very,* pp 134-137).

[34] At the present time, Russian Baptist churches hold diverse views on salvation and predestination, which is considered as acceptable by the leadership of the Union (I. V. Podberezskii, "O Kalvinizme, Kharismatii, Voiennoi sluzhbe i Mnogom Mnogom Drugom. S Predsedateliem RSEKHB Y. K. Sipko Beseduiet I. V. Podberezskii" ["About Calvinism, Charismatics, Military Service and Many other things. I. V. Podberezskii's Conversation with Y. K. Sipko, the President of RUECB"], in *Khristianskoie Slovo [Christian Word]*, No 2, 2003, p 35).

> The Bible is the divine revelation, given by God to people; it is a full and infallible guide and authority in all matters of religion and morality. One should believe all that it teaches and obey all that it requires; consider all that it suggests as being right and good; avoid all that it condemns as being inaccurate and harmful. However, one should not impose upon another's conscience as a religious obligation the things that are not commanded or taught.
>
> The New Testament is a constitution for a Christian, a charter of freedom, the only authoritative code of laws, a guarantee and a justification of all Christian assurance.[35]

Although Baptists differed from Stundists, Evangelical Christians and Molokans in a number of ways and practices, their core convictions were the same with biblical interpretation at the heart of it. Despite having ordained presbyters (which remained a divisive issue for various Stundist groups for many years) Baptists had a significant number of lay preachers.[36] Their messages were not much different to what was heard in Stundist and Pashkovite meetings – the importance of repentance and transformed, holy living, and the need to study the Bible and follow its teaching. Similar to other baptistic believers, among the Baptists there existed a wide diversity of interpretations, which inevitably resulted in severe criticism from the Orthodox Church.

Evangelical Christians

Puzynin in his analysis of Radstock's biblical interpretation and theological views, argued that the roots of the hermeneutical approach, practiced by Pashkovites (Evangelical Christians), should be placed in Anglo-American evangelicalism. He points to the fact that Radstock for a number of years belonged to the Brethren movement, thus was coming with certain theological presuppositions

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[35] V. G. Pavlov, "Pravda o Baptistakh" ["The Truth about Baptists"], in Karetnikova, *Al'manakh Po Istorii Russkogo Baptisma*, p 266, quoted after Kuznetsova, "Early Russian Evangelicals…", p 75.

[36] Even today, in the majority of traditional Russian Baptist congregations, almost every baptised man is expected/asked to participate in the "ministry of the Word." The difference, however, is in far greater role that a pastor (and other leaders of the church) plays in forming a group of preachers, and controlling other people's access to the pulpit (for more in-depth review of the current state of Russian Baptist preaching go to Chapter 5 of this research).

to the Scripture, despite his insistence that he was 'just reading the Bible.'[37] According to Puzynin, Lord Radstock, whose preaching became the catalyst for the tradition, was clearly bringing an alternative theological and hermeneutical tradition to that of the Orthodox Church,

> The theological hermeneutics of Radstock was of a typological, Christocentric, literalist, pneumatic and experiential nature typical of the hermeneutics of the emerging holiness movement… Biblical texts were read through the grid of preconceived theological frameworks in order to achieve two major goals: the conversion of nominal Christians, and the edification of born-again Christians. In the process of producing the desired meaning, Radstock would not be constrained by literary or historical contexts. Typological interpretation was used with both Old and New Testament texts. Biblical personages were used as types either of the contemporary audience or of the transcendent Christ.[38]

Radstock believed that reading the Bible was sufficient to enable a Christian to understand and follow the way of Christ. In his teaching and preaching he tried to help the listeners to see themselves 'as part of the scriptural story of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, interpreted through an evangelical grid, with its focus on convertive piety and assurance of salvation.'[39] As noted by Leskov, Radstock's success

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[37] James P. Callahan offers the following description of such primitivist reading of the Bible, 'By reading the Bible, not interpreting it, the Brethren thought themselves equipped to understand the belief and practices of the apostolic church. They appealed to their application of the Bible to the contemporary church in a direct manner; they claimed to read the Bible with a simple literalism; they argued that the Bible should be received and obeyed rather than interpreted; they advised others not to trust interpretative systems; and they rejected the allegorical reading of prophecy…' (*Primitivist Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* (Lanham, Scarecrow, 1996), pp 150-151). This insight is rather important for the current research since it is very similar to the hermeneutical principle, identified by McClendon as a Baptist Vision, which as he argued, is a main characteristic feature of any baptistic group. For more detailed analysis of McClendon's hermeneutics and his concept of the Baptist Vision see Chapter 5 and 6 of this research.

[38] Puzynin, *The tradition of the Gospel Christians,* p 51. See also Kuznetsova, "Early Russian Evangelicals…," pp 105-108.

[39] Andrey Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Reconstruction of the Practice of Biblical Interpretation," in *Theological Reflections,* Vol. 13 (2012), p 35.

among the St. Petersburg's nobility was not due to his eloquence or exquisite manners. Rather, it was his simple faith and immediacy in his relationship to God that made people interested in his message.[40]

In the life and teaching of Colonel Pashkov, who was converted through Radstock's preaching, one can see a more radical split from the Orthodox Church than that of the Stundists. From being a nominal Christian, he turned into a passionate supporter of the new Christian movement, known for its grand-scale charity and educational projects inspired by biblical teaching. His personal life and ministry has been the subject of a number of serious studies, hence it is not worth going into many details of it here. I will only briefly address some of Pashkov's approach to the Scripture, since it is relevant for my research.

Pashkov viewed his conversion and subsequent transformation as a direct work of Christ through the Holy Spirit. He believed that after the conversion, the Holy Spirit continued to work in the life of a Christian, helping them to understand the biblical narrative. Thus, he rejected the teaching of the Orthodox Church about the important role of the Tradition. (This, however, was to some extent a result of Pashkov's rather shallow understanding of Orthodoxy.) Instead, the Bible was to be read prayerfully, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal its true meaning.[41]

Puzynin argues that Radstock, and later Pashkov, were bringing western evangelicalism, a foreign Christian paradigm into the Russian Empire. He showed similarities of their teaching to Brethren views on the Bible and gradual deviation of Pashkovites from the Orthodox Church. One of the most important things that Pashkov (and the whole movement of Evangelical Christians) learnt from Radstock was a hermeneutical tool of literal and typological reading of the Scripture. As Princess Sofia Lieven wrote, Lord Radstock was to be thanked for opening the richness and depth of

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[40] Leskov, *Schism in High Society,* pp 112-114, 196-197. Cf. Heier also notices, 'Both friends and foes had to admit that there was certainly nothing in Radstock himself to account for the effect that was produced by his preaching. Yet his evangelical message, without outward intellectual shine, without theological fineness, in imperfect French, was eagerly welcomed by the Orthodox barons, princes, counts and generals as a fresh revelation of Christian truth.' (*Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy,* p 56).

[41] Puzynin, *The tradition of the Gospel Christians,* pp 72-97.

the Bible to the Evangelical Christians, which made them strongly rooted in the Scripture, thus enabling them to stand firm during the persecutions.[42] However, Puzynin notes, 'Pashkov was obviously unaware of the theological and philosophical filter he had inherited from Radstock with regard to the interpretation of the Bible.'[43] Hence, Pashkov's theological stance was not grounded in any theological system. Rather, it was characterised by the lack of doctrinal knowledge (either Protestant or Orthodox) and heavy reliance on direct quotations from the New Testament. Theologically, Pashkov shared many convictions with Russian Baptists, Stundists and Molokans, all of whom did not have any other common ground, but a worldview shaped by the Orthodoxy and literal reading and application of the Scripture to their life and faith.[44]

Post-revolution (after 1917) development of hermeneutics of Evangelical Christians, as reflected in the ministry of Prokhanov, can be described as a combination of 'insights from the historical-grammatical method of interpretation derived from his studies for a short period of time under Adolf von Harnack coexisting with those derived from the Alexandrian hermeneutics of multiple senses of scripture that he borrowed from unnamed sources, most likely of Russian Orthodox origin.'[45] This approach was further developed by V. Bykov, one of the leaders of Evangelical Christians at the beginning of the 20th century, and can be characterised by heavy emphasis on the spiritual condition of the interpreter, and the active role of the Holy Spirit in revealing

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[42] *Dukhovnoie Probuzdeniie v Rossii [Spiritual Awakening in Russia]* (Korntal, Svet na Vostoke, 1967), p 32.

[43] Puzynin, *The tradition of the Gospel Christians,* p 74.

[44] Addressing such a phenomenon of similarity of biblical interpretation in various contexts, McClendon notes that despite multiple hermeneutical methods, various interpretive practices and approaches to reading the Scripture, 'the main course of Christian Bible reading has held true over the centuries to the plain sense of Scripture – its stories were read as (in the main) real stories about real people; its history, real history, its declarations about God and God's creatures as saying what they meant and meaning what they said. The Bible was not a code or cipher to be cracked; it was not a book of secrets; it was realistic; it spoke plain.' (McClendon, *Doctrines*, p 36).

[45] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 36. In his book *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* Puzynin offers in-depth analysis of Prokhanov's hermeneutical method as found in his unpublished writings. See pp 182-185.

the meaning of the Text. Bykov even claims that without spiritual regeneration, it is impossible for a person to understand the meaning of the Bible. The Bible must be interpreted through the Christocentric prism, since all of the Scriptures are pointing to Jesus Christ (as in Luke 24:25-27). He also distinguishes the two meanings of every biblical passage – spiritual and literal, insisting that both meanings must be employed, as they complement each other, helping the reader to get a balanced interpretation. Bykov also indicates the importance of understanding the context of the passage.[46] Pointing out the roots of greater openness of the Evangelical Christians to other interpretive traditions, Puzynin notes,

> This shift did not disrupt the tradition initiated by Radstock. The pneumatological starting point for interpreting scripture, as well as the literal and typological pietistic approach to interpretation, had not changed since the origin of the tradition. However, the tradition began to take a more cautious posture towards the excesses of pneumatic enthusiasm, in light of the development of the Pentecostal movement…[47]

In this chapter I am attempting to draw a paradigm of the development of preaching among Russian Baptists. The initial formative years of the movement show fascinating complexity of factors that have contributed to the development of the character of the contemporary Baptist movement in Russia. The movement had indigenous roots (Molokans and some Stundist groups), influenced by both British (Pashkovites) and German (Baptists) Christians. It started in different geographical areas (the distance between St. Petersburg and Odessa is over 1,600 km; from Odessa to Tiflis (now Tbilisi) is over 1,700 km). It had diverse social composition (from wealthy aristocrats in the North to poor peasants in the South). The movement had a dissimilar stance towards the Orthodox Church (Baptists had clear denominational affiliation, whilst many Pashkovites did not want to break away from the national church, even after their leaders were exiled from the country). Despite the differences, these groups were similar in their theology and ecclesiology. All of them were characterised by the emphasis they placed on the importance of individual and communal Bible study and

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[46] Puzynin, *The tradition of the Gospel Christians,* pp 185-186.

[47] Ibid., p 187.

its application. Every Christian had a right to interpret the Holy Scriptures; everyone had a duty to share God's message with others. Kuznetsova wrote,

> Recent converts were finding great joy in newly discovered biblical truths. Many of them overcame the barrier of illiteracy and quickly realised the freedom of reading and searching the Scripture for themselves. As they did so, the Bible took on enormous significance for them. They regarded the Bible as the disclosure of God's very will. To this belief they… emphasised the Holy Spirit's assistance in the process of interpretation and application of Scripture. Another important feature was the great importance that they... placed upon obedience to revealed truths and following Christ.[48]

Such freedom to interpret God's word without the constraints of a particular dogmatic theology played an important role in the quick spread of the baptistic movement across the Russian Empire. Simple proclamation of biblical truth of salvation interpreted through the lenses of the Orthodox understanding of holy Christian living rang true to the hearts of many listeners. The message they heard was not a foreign teaching. Rather, it was an embodiment of the Gospel truth, already deeply rooted in the society.[49] Lack of style or clarity of the sermons proclaimed by (often) self-taught preachers was not a distraction either – it wasn't much different from the sermons in the Orthodox Churches with their heavy emphasis on God's mysterious work that took place in the act of proclamation, regardless of the level of listeners' comprehension of the message.

3.3 Big dreams and dashed hopes: 1905-1929

Prior to 1905 Russian law drew a sharp difference between ethnic Russians and non-Russians when it came to questions of religious practice. Non-Russians were allowed to form their own churches and were free to worship the way they wanted. For example, those Germans who lived in the Russian Empire could belong to Lutheran, Mennonite or Catholic congregations. Ethnic Russians could only be Orthodox. Only the Russian Orthodox Church could proselytize among the citizens of

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[48] Kuznetsova, "Early Russian Evangelicals…", p 404.

[49] I have argued this point more extensively in my article "Back to the Future."

the Empire. Conversion to any other faith was a criminal offence.[50] Nonetheless, Baptists and Evangelical Christians were extremely active in spreading their beliefs. The fact that their preaching was supported by their transformed life made it compelling for others.[51] Baptistic groups and churches were appearing in many towns and villages of the Empire. They were so successful in their missionary work that, as Kushnev noted, by 1916 there was not a village in Russia that did not encounter baptistic witness.[52] Different sources vary in the evaluation of the numerical growth of the baptistic movement, ranging from around 20,000 to 100,000 members before 1905. By 1914 the most conservative estimation is over 50,000 members, whilst others speak about 300,000 or even higher numbers.[53]

As indicated in the previous paragraph, regardless of the system of counting, it is clear that after 1905, in a relatively short period, the number of baptistic believers in Russia doubled or even tripled. Such rapid growth became possible thanks to a new

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[50] Peter Waldron, "Religious Toleration in Late Imperial Russia," in Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson, eds., *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989), pp 103-105. See also R. Latimer, *Dr. Braedek and His Apostolic Work in Russia* (London, Morgan and Scott, 1908), pp 190-192.

[51] Coleman offers another insight into the fast spread of the Baptist movement in Russia. She notices that Baptists were giving their members a sense of belonging to a new society, escaping social unrest and economic struggles, 'Certainly changing social identities played a part in the evangelical movement, where (mostly) lower class Russians conceived a community in which they could express themselves as individuals and find respect and opportunities for self-development and leadership. But the Baptists drew fundamentally different conclusions from similar circumstances. Although scholars are very familiar with the revolutionary narrative of self-transformation, an examination of Baptists' personal narratives reveals how religious conversion offered itself as another means for navigating the same problems of social inequality, of order and disorder, of modernization and Westernization, and of national and social identity in this rapidly changing society. I examine how these new religious identities emerged from individuals' personal experiences and were then articulated by the ritual re-telling of conversion stories and by forming organizations that reflected and promoted their members' new sense of self.' (Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, p 4).

[52] Kushnev, *Nemetskiie Very*, p 3.

[53] Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol. 1, p 262; Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals,* p 23; M. Elliott and A. Deyneka, "Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union," in J. Witte & M. Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1999), p 197.

law from April 17th, 1905, "On the Strengthening of Religious Toleration." This law legalised the existence of Evangelical and Baptist churches. They received the right to be officially registered and carry out their religious practices without fear of persecution, even though the Orthodox Church remained an established church and preserved its exclusive right to proselytise.[54] The implications of this law for Baptists, and all other non-Orthodox believers, were so great that some considered this law of equal importance to the revolutionary liberation of the serfs by Alexander II.[55]

Rejoicing about their new status, baptistic churches could not predict how long such freedom would last, thus they channelled all their energy into the outreach – sending missionaries, planting new churches and Bible-reading groups. Some of them, like Kargel and Prokhanov, Pavlov or Wilhelm Fetler, became important leaders of the baptistic movement, whose heritage is difficult to overestimate. At the same time, there were countless others, who went to the distant corners of the Empire driven by their enthusiasm and passion for God's Kingdom. They were not taught or sent by any specific congregation. Their only tools were the Bible and preaching. There are even accounts of people turned into preachers after visiting one evangelistic meeting, undergoing conversion and deciding to commit their life to Christ. Such people did not even have Bibles, and their Christian experience was limited to one or two sermons that had brought them to conversion.

V. Ivanov, a pastor from Baku, wrote about this period, 'Armed with the truth of God, [the Baptists] boldly enter into an unequal battle with errors of all sorts and expand their spiritual territory with great success… Since 1905 an era has begun in the history of the Baptists that can be called the era of open storm.'[56] 'The errors of all sorts' were to be expected with Baptists' diverse cultural, theological and doctrinal backgrounds. Prior to

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[54] Lieven, *Dukhovnoie Probuzdeniie v Rossii*, p 105; G. Ellis and L. Jones, *The Other Revolution. Russian Evangelical Awakening* (Abilene, Abilene Christian University Press, 1996), p 141; Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol.1, p 251.

[55] Latimer, *Dr Braedek and His Apostolic Work in Russia*, p 42. For more detailed explanation of the implication of the new legislation and baptists' reaction to it, see Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, Chapter 2.

[56] V. V. Ivanov, "Polozheniie baptistov" ["The Situation Baptists are in"], in *Baptist*, No. 9 (23 February 1911), p 69, quoted after Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, p 27.

1905 baptistic communities held only a small number of conferences where some organisational and theological issues were addressed, hence individual congregations (and preachers) had ultimate authority in interpretation and application of the Scripture, which with the numerical growth of the movement resulted in a great 'interpretive entropy.'[57]

The leadership of the movement adopted a number of strategies to cope with such theological diversity of its members, which started to cause various problems in local churches. I have already mentioned that at the meeting that formed the Baptist Union, a conscious decision to allow difference of opinions was made. Congregations were given the right to decide 'as they see fit to do before God.' Puzinin notes there always was 'a willingness to drop one's own interpretation in order to protect the spirit of mutual love that reflects Trinitarian unity in diversity.'[58] However, several steps were also used 'to resist unrestricted subjectivism and the threatening danger of interpretive chaos.'[59] Among them were the use of the Apostolic Creed, conferences[60] where various theological and practical issues were discussed and debated,[61] and perhaps the most important one, educational use of the publications.

The Christian printed media

In the 19th and early 20th centuries books, journals and newspapers played a very important role in Russian society. Education became more accessible for poor people only in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, for the majority of Russia's population, published materials were first of all associated with sacred texts (prayer books, etc.) of

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[57] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…", p 36.

[58] Ibid., p 36.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Both Baptists and Evangelical Christians achieved significant results in bringing structural coherence to the movements. Two Unions were formed – The Congress of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (1905) (CECB) and the All-Russia Union of Evangelical Christians (1909) (ARUEC). Eventually, every region of the country had a local association of churches that coordinated its missionary activity, publications and spiritual education. (Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii*, pp 134-150)

[61] These conferences addressed questions of divorce, laying of hands, women in ministry, youth work and worship (singing in churches) and many others (Savinskii, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov,* Vol. 1, pp 294-295).

the Orthodox Church. Even though this has changed with the rapid development of printed media, 'people preserved a special reverence for printed materials, which were extremely valued and trusted.'[62] A. Popov points out that the power of printed media was so great that a number of publications (such novels as I. Turgenyev, *Fathers and Sons*; N. Chernishevsky, *What is to be done*?) triggered the start of several social movements.[63] Hence, an extremely strict governmental control and censorship of this area of public life was to be expected.

The role of books and magazines in the appearance and development of the baptistic movement in Russia is difficult to overestimate. Colporteurs were among the first missionaries, distributing Bibles and other spiritual literature, as well as interpreting it (preaching) to the most uneducated citizens of the Empire.[64] Pashkov's *Society for the Encouragement of Spiritual and Moral Reading* (opened in 1874) has published a large amount of spiritual literature, including the works of John Bunyan, collections of Charles Spurgeon's sermons, collections of hymns, and many others.[65] Heier wrote that baptistic communities have 'developed an enormous propaganda machine unparalleled in the Russian Empire at the time.'[66]

As early as 1889 Prokhanov started Russia's first evangelical periodical *Beseda,* which meant a "talk."[67] It was impossible to receive permission from the authorities

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[62] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 55.

[63] Ibid.

[64] J. C. Zacek, "The Russian Bible Society and the Russian Orthodox Church," in *Church History*, Vol. 35 (1966), pp 411-437.

[65] Sheryl Corrado, "The Gospel in society: Pashkovite social outreach in late imperial Russia," in Sheryl Corrado and Toivo Pilli, eds., *Eastern European Baptist History: new Perspectives* (Prague, IBTS, 2007), pp 52-70. For a rather detailed list of evangelical books and authors published at the beginning of the 20th century see Kuznetsova, "Early Russian Evangelicals…," pp 237-239.

[66] Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy,* p 118.

[67] Strictly speaking, *Russkii Rabochii [Russian Worker]* was the first magazine published by Russia's evangelical Christians from 1875. However, it wasn't an explicitly denominational Christian magazine. It contained neither materials for Bible study nor sermons. The journal's main thrust was to offer moral guidance to working class people. It used simple, easy to read language. Heier wrote about it, 'The Russian Workman was the most important publication of the Radstockist Society for the Encouragement of Spiritual and Ethical reading. Although

for such a publication. Nonetheless, they decided to produce the journal, which was sent all across Russia to baptistic communities, including preachers in exile. Prokhanov wrote,

> The joy from the first copies that reached our brothers and sisters was great. We did not even expect such great feedback… These copies of *Beseda* contained spiritual support, encouragements, and we were told again and again that when reading these small pages, brothers received great satisfaction among all kinds of trials, received inner peace and joy into their hearts.[68]

A. Popov notices that this journal became a model for all the subsequent publications of Evangelical Christians and Baptists.[69]

After 1905 non-Orthodox Christians received a unique opportunity to legally publish their own newspapers and journals.[70] Prokhanov applied to the government for permission to start publishing work almost immediately after the appearance of the legislation allowing religious freedom. The first issue of *Khristianin* [*The Christian*] saw the light on the 1st of January 1906.[71] It was published (with short breaks during Revolution 1917 and the following civil war) until the end of 1928, when it was closed

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the journal was non-sectarian, non-political, and not in the least polemical, and disseminated only cheap and instructive ethical reading among the common people, Leskov dismissed it as an "unnecessary venture." What annoyed him most was that much of the material, consisting of various religious illustrations and moral stories, was taken from the Religious Tract Society in London without remoulding it to suit the milieu of the common Russian people.' (Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy,* p 72. Cf. V. Popov, "Pervii Evangelskii Zhurnal v Rossii" ["First Evangelical Journal in Russia"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 3 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1998), pp 23-29).

[68] Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* pp 69-70.

[69] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", p 55.

[70] For a full list of various journals and newspapers produced by Baptists and Evangelical Christians, see G. A. Kuznetsov, "Nashi Evangelskie Zhurnaly" ["Our Gospel Journals"], in *Bratskii Vestnik*, Vol. 5 (1965), p 65.

[71] According to Puzynin, *Khristianin* took the same name and structure (and a number of articles) as the British non-denominational revivalist newspaper *The Christian* (*The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* pp 136-137).

by Soviet atheistic authorities. Prokhanov formulated three main principles of the periodical. Firstly, to open the essence of Christianity to Russian people, and to show them Christ and His eternal salvation. Secondly, to encourage evangelism and the building of Russia's Evangelical church, aiming at leading people towards reformation of their spiritual being. Thirdly, to bring unity to all branches of living Christianity in Russia.[72] According to Puzynin,

> These periodicals[73] were the chief means of creating the movement's identity and shaping its theology… It allowed all kinds of Christians to share their testimonies, thoughts, and impressions. The key feature of the periodicals of this period was their tendency toward polyphony. Similar to contemporary Internet forums, where everyone can leave a message, the periodicals sometimes contained contradictory viewpoints.[74]

Khristianin contained various devotional articles, poems and hymns, sermons of prominent preachers (Spurgeon, Prokhanov and others), Bible study material and articles on the history of the church, and some educational stories for little children. An important part of the journal were sections on evangelical work in Russia and evangelical work abroad, thus establishing a link between scattered and often oppressed Evangelical Christians in Russia with stronger movements around the world (particularly in the UK and the USA). The content of the journal had changed significantly over the period of time. Its first issues contained mostly translated articles and sermons from English and American sources, as well as articles on "Christian basics"[75] – "Why do you live?" (Vol.3, 1906), "Freedom in Christ" (Vol. 5, 1906), "How to pray" (Vol. 6 and 7, 1906), "The Holy Spirit", "How to live a happy life" (Vol.9, 1906), "The outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (Vol.

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[72] Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* pp 135-136.

[73] Apart from *Khristianin*, Evangelical Christians produced *Bratskii Listok [The Brotherly Leaflet], Molodoi Vinogradnik [Young Vineyard] and Utrenniaia Zvezda [Morning Star].* For more detailed insight into the goals of these periodicals see Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* pp 136-138; also Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution,* pp 30-34.

[74] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* p 138.

[75] Puzynin shows that in the first year of *Khristianin,* the main thrust of the publication were themes of the pouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. (*The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* p 142).

10, 1906), "How to have a correct perspective on things" (Vol. 12, 1906), etc. The later issues contain theological materials suitable for more mature Christians, such as Kargel's commentaries on various books of the Bible, theological essays by N. Kazakov, and others. Many issues of the journal contained "sermon notes" – brief or even extended sermon outlines prepared for the use of the preachers and pastors in churches across the country. Such a service had a double aim – it was an important ministry for many small congregations, which used the journal as their primary source of teaching material.[76] Apart from it, as a result of such "mass preaching," the leadership of the Union could achieve greater theological coherence in otherwise diverse congregations.[77]

Baptist, the journal of the Baptist Union[78] was similar to *Khristianin* in its pattern, use, and purposes. However, it maintained a much clearer denominational stance. The issues of the journal regularly contained articles on Baptist Beliefs, the meaning of the term "Baptist," and many others, explaining the difference between Baptists and Orthodox, and between the Baptist Union and other evangelical Christians in Russia.[79]

Christian education

Publications proved to be a precious tool for baptistic leadership in developing and shaping Baptist and Evangelical congregations. They brought a sense of unity,

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[76] Coleman offers quotes from several letters sent to *Khristianin* where people thanked God for the journal, for the encouragement it brought to them and the work of evangelism that it carried. They also wrote that the journal was read during the services, and was used as a study tool for the congregation. (Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution,* p 34).

[77] Cf. Johannes Dick, "Vsplesk Svobodi: 1905 God v Istorii Svobodnikh Tserkvei Rossii v Teologicheskoi Perspective" ["Splash of Freedom: Theological perspective on 1905 in History of Russian Free Churches"], in N. A. Beliakova and A. V. Sinichkin, eds., *105 Let Legalizatsii Russkogo Baptisma [105 Years of Legalization of Russian Baptism]* (Moscow, RUECB, 2011), p 94.

[78] The decision to publish the journal was made at the all-Russian congress of the Baptist Union in May 1907. The first issue of the journal was published in June of the same year. The revolution of 1917, subsequent civil war, and economic difficulties of the following years were the reasons for the publications to stop (from 1918 until 1925). The journal was published again from 1925 until 1929, when it was finally closed by the communistic authorities, as part of their war with religion (A.V. Sinichkin, "Istoriia Zhurnala "Baptist"" ["The History of the journal *Baptist"*] accessed on 19.03.2015 from http://www.kovcheg-spasenya.ru).

[79] This was different from Prokhanov's *Khristianin*, which appeared as more broadly evangelical and 'showed no denominational narrowness' (Brandenbugh, *The Meek and The Mighty,* p 134).

enabling even the most remote congregations to feel that they were part of a greater community of believers all across Russia and beyond. Journals offered some educational materials on baptistic convictions, church history and biblical theology, thus partly solving the problem of subjectivism in biblical interpretation. Finally, conversion narratives often published on the pages of evangelical journals helped to challenge readers' spiritual development and cultivated a call to and urgency of evangelistic work.[80] All of the above contributed to a formation of particular denominational identities.

As I have previously stated, preaching was given special attention in publications. It was assumed that the best way to teach preachers was by providing an example. Thus every issue of *Khristianin* and *Baptist* contained at least one sermon from a famous baptist preacher (Spurgeon, Prokhanov, W. Fetler, Moody, just to name a few). Ample amounts of stories from various Christian churches and situations, both from Russian context and from Anglo-American Christian culture, were offered and used as important preaching material. Preaching notes and sermon outlines provided another way to help pastors in their ministry, but also served to educate preachers across the country. Finally, although irregularly, journals published extended articles on how to preach.[81]

Apart from the recognition of the benefits of using printed media, from the early years of baptistic movement in Russia, its leaders showed appreciation for Christian education.[82] Dei Mazaev, who served as a president of the Russian Baptist Union for

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[80] Coleman argued that 'Russian Baptists' conversion stories usually drive home the point that, in the end, neither the religious traditions of their youths nor revolutionary politics could offer them the assurance of salvation that they craved. Instead, Baptist auto-biographers emphasize the role of ordinary believers in shaping the thinking of potential converts and in guiding them toward achieving salvation. In so doing, they paint a picture of an egalitarian, self-educating movement of working people.' Thus, simple, uneducated people were given an urge to evangelise, reach out to the fallen world of sin. (For an extensive analysis of the use of conversion narratives see Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution,* Chapter 3). Cf. A. Popov, '"The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," Part III.

[81] E.g. A series of articles on preaching by M. Timoshenko, "Kafedra" ["The Pulpit"], in *Baptist,* Vol. 36 (1911), p 284.

[82] E.g. Pavlov and Kargel were sent to study at a seminary in Germany, as preparation for their ministry; Prokhanov studied extensively in a number of evangelical seminaries and colleges in Europe. Cf. Kuznetsova, "Early Russian Evangelicals…," p 248.

over 20 years, at the end of the 19th century, indicated the need for developing theological schools. He called people to pray, asking God to send His ministers, 'clothed in contemporary theological education.'[83] It was recognized that society was changing and certain views and practices, which were acceptable only few years ago, required modification. M. Timoschenko, one of the Baptist leaders, wrote, 'When God's work only started to develop, whoever opened the Gospel were fascinated – everything was new, unknown, thus interesting. Today we live in a different time, hence we've got new requirements.'[84] Preparation of people for ministry through more formal educational arrangements was seen as a way forward.

One of the first projects initiated by Prokhanov after 1905 was the organization of a 6-week study course for young preachers from St. Petersburg, Samara and other places from across Russia. They were taught biblical interpretation, theology, homiletics, church history. The unusual features of these courses were non-theological disciplines – grammar, Russian literature, history, and geography.[85] Among their teachers were Kargel, Prokhanov, Pavel Nikolaii and a number of other leaders of Evangelical Christians and of Baptists. Despite that early attempt and continuous struggle with the authorities, the permission to open a school was only received in 1913. Prokhanov wrote, 'In that year we have opened a regular Bible school, which became the first Protestant Bible school in Russia with education in the Russian language.'[86] 19 students were enrolled in the first year. Among them were Lithuanians, German Mennonites, Georgians, Ossetians, Belorussians, and Russians. Such diversity came from the need 'to bring God's Word to all the nations,' which required the training of people from different ethnic groups. [87] The

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[83] A. Nagirniak, "Bibleiskiie Kursi Baptistov v Moskve v 1927-1929 Godakh" ["Bible Courses in Moscow in 1927-1929"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov. Istoriia i Perspectivi: Sbornik Statei [Tradition of Preparation of Ministers in the Brotherhood of Evangelical Christians–Baptists. History and Prospects: Collection of Articles]* (Moscow, RUECB, 2013), p 107.

[84] Timoshenko, "Kafedra," p 285.

[85] Marina S. Karetnikova, "U Istokov Sovremennogo Religioznogo Obrazovaniia V Rossii" ["At the Roots of Contemporary Religious Education in Russia"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov*, p 68.

[86] *V Kotle Rossii*, p 136.

[87] Ibid., pp 164-165.

work of the school was interrupted during the World War I, yet it was restarted in 1922 and operated until 1929. During this period over 450 people were trained for ministry.[88]

There were others who also contributed to the formation of Russian theological education and ministerial training apart from the above mentioned attempts by Prokhanov. The first Baptist training centre was in Lodz, Poland (at that time part of the Russian Empire). The school was opened by German Baptists and, for a long time, remained the only Baptist school in Russia. In 1922-1924 Pavlov together with V. Stephanov led short theology and preaching courses in different areas of the country. After a number of appeals, the authorities allowed the Baptist Union to open a Bible school in Moscow. This took place in 1927 and only operated for 2 years, being closed at the beginning of a new wave of atheistic persecutions of the church.[89] On the other side of Russia, in its Far Eastern region, Christian education was first of all connected with such names as Yakov Vince, Robert Fetler, Nikolai Peisti, Eric Olson and August Lindstedt. All of these people received theological training in England, USA, Germany, Sweden or Finland.[90] They started a number of training programmes for Baptist missionaries and pastors in 1919-1922. The skills related to preaching were given particular attention, since preaching was seen as a key ability, necessary for missionary and pastoral work. Whilst there is no record left regarding the content of the above mentioned educational programmes, the existence of numerous links to various western (and particularly American) educational institutions allows to assume a high degree of borrowing and adapting of western materials to the realities of the post-revolutionary Russia.[91]

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[88] V. A Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi v Tserkvakh Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov" ["Indigenous School of Preaching in the Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov*, p 39.

[89] Nagirniak, "Bibleiskiie Kursy Baptistov," pp 103-114.

[90] A. Dementiev, *Evangelskoie Dvizheniie v Primorie: 1898 - 1990 [Evangelical Movement in Primorie: 1898 - 1990]* (Vladivostok, Russkii Ostrov, 2011), pp 63, 65.

[91] N. Potapova, "Vosproizvodstvo Kadrov Sluzhitelei Dalnevostochnikh Baptistskikh Tserkvei v Usloviiakh Sistemnogo Crizisa 1917-1922" ["Preparation of Ministers in Baptist Churches in the Far East in the Time of Crisis of 1917-1922"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov,* pp 74-92.

Now I would like to have a closer look at the work of Prokhanov, particularly in relation to his homiletical views. Prokhanov played an extremely important role in the baptistic movement in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century through the leadership position he held with the Evangelical Christians, through his publishing activity and especially through his countless efforts in developing Christian education in Russia.[92] Therefore, in order to understand a trajectory that preaching in Russian baptistic churches was taking, it would be helpful to explore Prokhanov's views on preaching as they are reflected in a collection of essays *Kratkoie Ucheniie o Propovedy*.[93]

In this collection Prokhanov explains his passion for developing evangelical education in Russia, as a holistic alternative to the existing practices,

> There is hardly anybody who would deny that the religious condition of Russian people nowadays is tragic. It is true that people have gilded temples, pompous worship, famous pulpits, from which taught preachers proclaim sermons, created according to all the rules of homiletics – and even censored by the highest spiritual authorities, - yet, alas! All of that does not satisfy people's needs. Why is it so?
>
> To this we can answer: first of all because of the inner state of the preachers and the people; because of the lack of the true faith, and subsequent absence of life and the power of the Spirit in these official sermons. Sermons proclaimed from official pulpits speak about rituals, about philosophy, they are full of polemics with other religions, yet they are silent about the most important thing – about living Christ, as a source of salvation and life…

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[92] The Bible courses, which Prokhanov directed in Leningrad (now St Petersburg), until his emigration from the USSR, were of particular importance, since a number of its graduates became teachers at the Bible Correspondent Courses (BCC) of AUCECB, the only programme that Baptists received permission to have during the Soviet era (A. I. Mitskevich, *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov [History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists*] (Moscow, 2007), p 405.

[93] A collection of Prokhanov's lectures on homiletics, which later was published as a book *Kratkoie Ucheniie o Propovedy: Opit Evangelskoy Gomiletiki* [*Short Teaching on Preaching: Experience of Evangelical Homiletics*] (Korntal, Svet na Vostoke, 1969, accessed on 04.03.2014 from http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00107.htm).

> But God did not leave our people without His visitation. He is sending his spiritual bread to the people, which is God's Word, which was hidden from the people for hundreds of years, and yet, which resulted in Russia's Evangelical movement and which has given us new Gospel preaching.[94]

Prokhanov's goal was to bring spiritual renewal and transformation to the whole of Russia (this caused a rift from the CECB, which did not perceive such intense involvement with the wider society as a biblically sound pursuit). He viewed preaching as one of the key tools in reaching that grand vision. Hence, he invested a lot of effort in organising the Bible school, various courses and seminars on biblical interpretation and homiletics.[95] His lectures tried to highlight the importance of studying the discipline of homiletics and applying its insights to the process of preparation and delivery of a sermon. At the same time, he did not discard prevailing highly spiritualized views on preaching, saying that 'Desire to study preaching, turned into a science about preaching, resulted in a deadly formalism… Preaching in its highest meaning is the word of God transmitted through the lips of a man.'[96]

Prokhanov presents four types of preaching (depending on their purpose): (1) evangelism, sermons that call sinners to repentance; (2) edification or upbringing of Christians in their faith; (3) evangelism-edification, directed at calling sinners to repentance while providing education for believers; and finally, (4) interpretation, when the Scripture is being explained and made clear. He offers almost no further explanation on the types of preaching, compensating it by providing four sermons by Spurgeon, F. B. Meyer, and Prokhanov. He draws a sharp distinction between preaching, contemplation (*beseda,* literally 'a talk') and a lecture.

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[94] Prokhanov, *Kratkoie Ucheniie o Propovedy,* Introduction. This quote from Prokhanov's book requires a clarifying remark. Obviously, being a passionate proponent of theological education and particularly homiletics, Prokhanov's sharp critique of what seems to be 'a pastor with theological training' has to be seen in a context of the prevailing Orthodox ecclesial culture. Hence, when talking about 'sermons, which speak of rituals' and 'full of polemics', Prokhanov, first of all, aimed his critique at Orthodox preaching. It was assumed that Russian Evangelical preaching was done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[95] Even in prison in 1921, together with other Christians, they have organised a Bible school, where Prokhanov taught theology and homiletics (Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* p 197).

[96] Prokhanov, *Kratkoie Ucheniie o Propovedy,* Chapter 2.

> *Beseda* isn't a connected speech; it is more of a reflection that does not follow such requirements as consistence or the need to have one defined subject… A *lecture* is a thought through, logically built public speech, that is devoted to one subject from the perspective of an impassionate disengaged observer (who tries to be objective)… Unlike *beseda,* a *sermon* must have a clearly defined subject, one clear thought, which is to be logically developed. The *sermon's* difference from the lecture and one of the advantages, is in the feeling… which the speaker inputs into it.
>
> Often a preacher delivers "*Beseda"* or reads *"Lectures",* which clearly weakens the work of a sermon… A sermon's main merit is the action that it produces on its listeners…[97]

Prokhanov believed that although the success of preaching depended fully on it conforming to God's will, its content, style of delivery and the personality of a preacher (including time spent in preparation) also played an important role. He argued that Christian education (and particularly training of preachers) was a necessity, pointing at the Disciples of Jesus, who had spent 3.5 years with the greatest Teacher of all times, thus dismissing a common view that the Apostles were uneducated fishermen. At the same time, Prokhanov recognizes the problem of 'scholastic preaching,' irrelevant for the Church due to the preacher's inability to understand its everyday life. Thus, he believed that seminary training should be linked to the practical church ministry.[98]

In his lectures, Prokhanov deals with such questions as sermon preparation, where he insists that apart from the necessary inspiration from the Holy Spirit, a preacher's input also plays significant role. Moreover, he argues that 'those who say that the Holy Spirit gives thoughts and words only during the time when a person is in the church service,' have limited understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of sermon preparation and delivery.[99] Further addressing the question of

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[97] Ibid., Chapter 3.

[98] Ibid., Chapter 7.

[99] Ibid., Chapter 8.

preparation Prokhanov offers detailed instructions on (1) how to choose a text, and (2) how to explore the Scripture, trying to understand the meaning of the chosen passage better. [100] It must be noted that Prokhanov's recommendation is to use many parallel texts both for preparation to the sermon and for the delivery, thus making a sermon more convincing. Such practice is very common among Russian Baptists even today.

Prokhanov argued that preaching should always preserve the spirit of the teaching of Christ as presented in the New Testament. It must 'imitate Christ's preaching,'[101] which means that preachers can only interpret the great truths of Christ and help their listeners to apply them to their lives. Hence, the following rules must be applied to a sermon[102]: (1) a sermon must contain some personal experience of a preacher. Its absence makes preaching dry and unrealistic. (2) The main purpose of a sermon must be the salvation of human souls. Although edification and teaching of believers must be present in preaching, its main purpose has to be a message of salvation. (3) Every sermon must have Jesus in its centre. A sermon without Christ is mere reflections of a preacher, rather than preaching.[103]

Prokhanov also mentions a number of recommendations for a preaching event – preacher's gestures, intonation, appearance, the length of a sermon, the style of speaking (including clarity of the argument, repetitions, etc.), and many others. His final remark, however, is something that hasn't been practiced at all, 'The preacher should leave no critical remarks about their sermon without attention, whether they come from friends or enemies. In no situation he should be offended by people's criticism. Instead he should be grateful for that, taking it into account and correcting mistakes. Our critics are out best teachers.'[104] As I will show in the next chapter, the practice of preaching gradually became over-spiritualized, leaving no space for critical evaluation, considering it inappropriate or even sinful.

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[100] Ibid., Chapter 9.

[101] Ibid., Chapter 10.

[102] It must be noted that these recommendations are still closely followed by the majority of Russian Baptist preachers. I will address this issue further in Chapter 4.

[103] Prokhanov, *Kratkoie Ucheniie o Propovedy,* Chapter 10.

[104] Ibid., Chapters 16, 17.

Let me draw a brief summary of the argument so far. In this section, I have addressed an important and fruitful period in Russian baptistic history. Relaxation of governmental restrictions on the work of non-Orthodox churches among ethnic groups traditionally seen as Orthodox (Russians, Ukrainians, etc.) led to an unprecedented growth and maturity of the baptistic movement. It grew numerically, but, which became very important for the next period of severe persecutions, it developed structurally and gained clear denominational identity.

Baptists and Evangelical Christians have made considerable efforts in developing tools for educating their communities and their leadership. Publications, training seminars and conferences, and eventually Bible schools – all geared towards one goal, the evangelization of the whole Russian Empire (before Revolution 1917) and later Soviet Russia. With a growing number of educated people, their greater exposure to international community, and perhaps most importantly, the vanishing novelty factor of the biblical message proclaimed outside of the traditional Orthodox liturgy, the education and training of missionaries, pastors and lay preachers gained paramount importance.

It was a thorny way of laying foundations for theological education (and particularly preachers' training). Its proponents needed to overcome barriers set by the authorities (both tsarist and later communistic), and significant resistance of those pastors and lay members, who perceived education (and especially theological studies) as a way to distance people from God and church, as a deviation to the simple way of Christ.[105] However, when most of these problems were overcome and those few schools began to function (with significant contribution from England, Germany, the USA and some other European countries), churches started to appreciate and welcomed their ministry. Congregations grew, various ministries developed, and new churches were planted.

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[105] E.g. Mazaev received a letter from a preacher, who insisted that theological education would only mess with young preachers' minds, thus affecting their potential for ministry and making them useless for local churches ("O Dukhovnikh Seminariakh" ["About Spiritual Seminaries"] in *Gost* (1912), Vol. 4, p 18). Such views can be observed even in today's Baptist Churches, when young people who received theological training are often looked down and preference is given to home-grown talents.

Of course, it would be naïve to expect that a short, although intensive, period when a few hundred people received some sort of theological training could have completely changed the way preaching was understood and practiced in Russia. Yet it was a beginning of something big that had the potential to transform both the baptistic movement and, perhaps, the whole country. Unfortunately, another change of government's policy brought the era of fast growth, relative prosperity, freedom, and high hopes for the future[106] to a sudden stop.

3.4 Trials and tribulations: living in a spiritual desert, 1929-1987

From the moment Bolsheviks gained power in 1917, they openly supported and promoted atheism. However, until 1929, atheistic propaganda was done in a fairly peaceful fashion. It can be compared to a new religious movement that entered the Russian religious scene, aggressively competing with the established players, and particularly the Orthodox Church. Of course, the competition was never fair, since the new "religion" received extensive support from the communistic authorities. Nonetheless, as Prokhanov noted, such rivalry allowed baptistic churches to work more efficiently. In 1929 the government introduced new legislation, clearly aiming at elimination of all religious organisation, more than that, at the destruction of all faiths. Most of the churches, monasteries, mosques, synagogues, and missionary centres were either destroyed or converted into cinemas, shops, warehouses. Pastors, priests, and other religious leaders were arrested and sent to labour camps or prisons in the remote areas of the USSR to serve terms of 10, 15 or 25 years. Many thousands were killed for their religious work. Their families lost their homes, could not find employment, and were therefore left without means for survival.[107]

There is no accurate number of how many people suffered as a result of Stalin's repressions. Various sources suggest different figures of imprisoned and murdered

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[106] Prokhanov's dream of building "Evangelsk", a large city in Siberia, populated primarily by evangelical Christians and governed by God's law, is only one example of the high hopes, big dreams and aspirations of the leadership of Russia's Evangelical Christians (Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* pp 225; Cf. V. Popov, "Khristianskiie Komunni I. S. Prokhanova I Gorod Solntsa" ["Christian Communes of I. S. Prokhanov and the City of Sun"], in Beliakova and Sinichkin, *105 Let Legalizatsii Russkogo*, pp 135-138).

[107] Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* pp 246-249.

Soviet citizens (estimates vary from 790,000 sentenced to death and over 4,000,000 given prison terms as the lowest estimate, to almost 20 million murdered and nearly 35 million sentenced to long imprisonment).[108] Christians were among the groups targeted by the State oppressive machine and the numbers of those who suffered for their faith were very high. According to A. Pereligin, in 1917 in Russia there were over 141 000 Orthodox priests. By 1941 over 140 000 were arrested, sentenced to long imprisonment or killed.[109] A majority of Baptist pastors and active members shared the fate of their Orthodox colleagues.[110]

The intensity of persecutions for Christians (and other people) lessened during World War II. Millions were released and rehabilitated (many posthumously) after Stalin's death. However, oppression of some sort continued all through the Soviet period. It was inevitable, therefore, that the communistic era would leave multiple marks and scars on the Baptist movement in Russia and other former Soviet republics – heavy and complex heritage that Christians were to deal with after the collapse of the USSR.[111] Without even trying to address a wide spectrum of issues Baptists had to face

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[108] E.g. V. Zemskii, "GULAG (Istoriko-Sotsialnii Aspekt)" ["GULAG (historical-sociological aspect)"], in *Sotsiologicheskiie Issledovaniia [Sociological Studies]*, Vol. 6 and 7, 1991; E. Bacon *The Gulag at War: Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives,* (N.Y., New York University Press, 1994); E. Applebaum, *Gulag: Pautina Bolshogo Terrora [Gulag: The Web of Great Terror]* (Moscow, Moskovskaia Shkola Politicheskikh Issledovanii [Moscow School of Political Research], 2006).

[109] A. Pereligin, "Orlovskaia Eparkhiia v 1943-1945" ["Orlov Eparchy in 1943-1945"], in N. Makarov, ed., *Istorii Russkoi Provintsii: Sbornik Statei [Narratives of Russian Province: Collection of Articles]* (St. Petersburg, Bibliopolis, 2006), p 343. Cf. I. Noble, Bauerová, T. Noble and Parushev*, The Ways of Orthodox Theology…*, Chapter 4.

[110] My grandmother, Lilija Onischenko, shared some of her memories of living under the Soviet oppressive regime. She said that in their church (in the Voronezh area), there were Sundays when people had gathered for a worship service, but no one was willing to start, and then, lead the service (the pastor, the deacons and all the preachers had been arrested by then). Then, someone from the congregation would come into the pulpit and start a service. In most cases, that person would be arrested the same evening. (Personal interview (Voronezh, 15.08.2007), available through the author). Cf. Keith G. Jones, "Baptists and Anabaptists revisited," in Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood, eds., *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Oxford, Regent's Park, 2010).

[111] See Petr Pavlyuk, "Destructivnoie Naslediie Sovetskogo Proshlogo" ["Destructive Heritage of the Soviet Past"], in Beliakova and Sinichkin, *105 Let Legalizatsii Russkogo Baptisma*, pp 40-45. See also Lina Andronoviene and Parush R. Parushev, who raise the issue of social responsibility, analysing the life of immigrant churches in the USA ("Church, State, and Culture: On the

under the Soviet regime, I will focus on one area of particular interest for this research – Christian education and preparation of preachers.

Atheistic academia vs. baptistic spirituality

None of the few educational programmes that Baptists and Evangelical Christians managed to start at the beginning of the 20th century could continue to operate after 1929. The government slightly changed its destructive policies in dealing with Christians during World War II. This change was partly forced by Nazi attempts to win loyalty of the population on occupied territories through allowing freedom of worship.[112] On the other hand, a change might be seen as recognition that brutal force did not achieve the desired results – many people kept their Christian faith. For Baptists and Evangelical Christians the change resulted in a merger into one union – the AUCECB in 1944 and the beginning of the publication of *Bratskii Vestnik,* the main, and, for most of the time, the only journal of the Baptist Union during the Soviet period.[113]

It might be necessary to add a clarifying note that two independent unions of Baptists and of Evangelical Christians ceased to exist as a result of the persecution of the Soviet authorities in the 1930-s. In 1944, and with the permission of the communistic government that was seeking to control the country's religious organisations, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians – Baptists (AUCECB) was formed. The congress-consultation of the representatives of Evangelical Christians

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Complexities of Post-Soviet Evangelical Social Involvement," *Theological Reflections. Euro-Asian Theological Journal* 3 (2004), 161-213 (in Russian, English, and Lithuanian)).

[112] For more information on the life of Russian evangelical Christians on occupied territories and the Nazi attitude to them see I. G. Ermolov, "Evangelskiie Khristiane – Baptisti v Period Okupatsii RSFSR 1941-1944" ["Evangelical Christians - Baptists during the Period of Occupation of Russian Federation in 1941-1944"], in Beliakova and Sinichkin, eds., *105 Let Legalizatsii Russkogo Baptisma*, pp 174-175.

[113] There exists a diversity of evaluations of the above mentioned shift in government's policy. A. Komarov argues that the formation of the AUCECB and other signs of relaxation of persecutions (e.g. the release of a number of pastors from prisons and labour camps) were nothing but an attempt of the Soviet Government to create some kind of "ministry of spiritual affairs" to execute better control 'from within' of the evangelical movement. ("Evangelskiie Christiane-Baptisti v Sisteme Gosudarstvenno-Religioznikh Otnoshenii v SSSR: 1944-63 gg" ["Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the system of State-Religious Relationships in USSR: 1944-63"], in *Evrasiia: Dukhovniie Traditsii Narodov [Eurasia: Spiritual Traditions of the Nations],* Vol. 3 (2012), pp 194-199).

and Baptists took place in October of that year, with a number of its participants being released from prisons and labour camps prior to the meetings. The congress decided to form one union, appointed its general council, and established a system of senior pastors [starshiie presvitera].[114]

These and some other decisions resulted in a formation of a system, which significantly restricted local congregations in their ability to make autonomous decisions, without receiving permission from the leadership of the Union, yet made it easier for the Soviet administration to have greater control of the Church. Whilst allowing the repressive regime to have impact on the decisions and actions of the Church might seem a controversial decision, it has to be remembered that the baptistic leaders had to choose between something bad (activities controlled by the Soviet state) and even worse – total prohibition and overt persecution of all religious practices in the country.[115]

The death of Stalin in 1953 marks an end of the era of "militant atheism" and the state's appropriation of a new approach to anti-religious oppression, the so-called "scientific atheism" of Khrushchev's time.[116] The authorities focused on "scientific" propaganda among young people, creating a perception in society that faith and science were in irresolvable conflict. In addition, they introduced practices of public

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[114] Apart from the Baptists and Evangelical Christians, there was a number of other non-Orthodox denominations that were forcefully brought into the AUCECB by the communistic authorities in order to exercise greater control over the religious life in the country. For example, the Pentecostal church "joined" the AUCECB in 1945, the Mennonites in 1966.

It must be recognised that such a merger caused many difficulties for congregations, which were somewhat different in their theology and practice. Hence, at present there is a diversity of opinions on the appearance of the AUCECB through such forceful integration of various congregations and denominations into one entity. However, as A. Popov notes, 'The unity which was offered by the All-Union Council of the ECB was what they needed in those circumstances. The forces that pushed them [various ecclesial groups] to unity were seen as stronger than their differences!' (A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 2).

[115] "Istoriia Ob'edineniia Evangelskikh Khristian i Baptistov v Odin Soyuz" [The History of the Merger of Evangelical Christians and Baptists into One Union], accessed on 01.06.2015 from http://baptist.org.ru/read/article/117007.

[116] Lev N. Mitrokhin, *Baptism: Istoriia i Sovremennost (Filosofsko-Sotsiologicheskiie Ocherki) [Baptist Movement: History and Contemporary situation (Philosophical-Sociological Articles)],* (St. Petersburg, Rossiiskaia Khristianskaia Gumanitarnaia Akademiia, 1997), pp 42-62.

intimidation of children and young people from Christian families in schools, at the same time imposing restrictions and limitations on all church activities related to youth work.[117] The authorities also attempted to discredit Christians by closing any access to advanced education. University training was made unachievable for believers. Hence, it was impossible for them to work in such spheres as medicine, education or art. What was left for Christians (and representatives of other religions) was manual labour in construction, agriculture or factories.[118]

Alexey V. Sinichkin, one of the leading voices in the area of Russian Baptist history, highlights a number of ways the Soviet Government attempted to discredit the Church through various policies it enforced on the Baptist Union through its governing body (AUCECB and senior pastors), which included prohibition of leading services or performing baptisms for anyone without the Council's approval and accreditation, significant restrictions placed on youth work, encouragement of the use of church discipline (particularly, excommunication from churches on grounds of unchristian or immoral living), and many others. It is particularly interesting the way the authorities attempted to control the ecclesial life of churches by allowing compilation and publication of the hymn-book in order to bring coherence into the lives of diverse congregations (as well as removal of any hymns with ambiguous, thus potentially inappropriate from the state's perspective, meaning) and a recommendation to focus teaching and preaching on spiritual matters, rather than practical issues related to everyday living. The governmental department dealing with religious affairs went as far as recommending the authorities to allow Baptists to open a Bible school, which could train pastors, who shared values of the communistic state and supported its politics, although this wasn't allowed.[119]

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[117] See Olena Panich, "Children and Childhood among Evangelical Christians-Baptists During the Late Soviet Period (1960s - 1980s)," in *Theological Reflections,* Vol. 13 *(*2012*),* p 156.

[118] For an in-depth description and analysis of Khrushchev's anti-religious policies see Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*: *Evangelicals in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (N. Jersey, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), Part IV. Also A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," pp 74-76.

[119] "Vlast i Sluzhiteli na Etape Formirovaniia VSEKHB" ["Authorities and Ministers at the Stage of Formation of AUCECB"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov,* pp 155-156.

One of the most significant consequences of "scientific atheistic propaganda" employed by the communistic authorities was a widening gap between academia and churches. Historically, Christians in Russia were on a more conservative side when it came to anything new introduced by educational institutions, whether secular or religious, despite what a well-known proverb was saying (Uchenie – svet, a neuchenie – t'ma [Learning is light, whilst ignorance is darkness]). Prokhanov wrote a story which sheds light into the widespread attitude to academic training. He wrote about a rich man who offered to give education to a poor man's son. That night, the poor man called his friends to discuss the offer. A deacon from a local church said that he shouldn't send his son to school, since it would make him an atheist. Another friend was convinced that education would make him disrespectful towards his parents. Yet another voice said that once educated, the boy wouldn't want to work…[120]

I have already mentioned that the roots of such perception of formal education can be traced to the period of Great Reforms (the reign of Alexander II), when universities received the reputation of being faithless places of free and rebellious thinking. Although the efforts of the baptistic leadership at the beginning of the 20th century in changing negative attitudes to theological training in churches started to bring fruits, Khruschev's atheistic surge on churches of the 1950s rekindled mistrust and even hostility to formal education. Moreover, from that time, schools and universities were seen as places that cultivated an atheistic worldview, hence young people were not advised to pursue higher education.[121] Simplicity and spirituality were found to be the answers. This will be further addressed in the next Chapter in my overview of the publications in *BV.*[122]

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[120] *V Kotle Rossii,* p 52.

[121] Talking about educational institutions, I obviously mean secular universities and institutes, since there were no theological schools in the Soviet Union.

[122] When considering Russian Baptist emphasis on preachers' spirituality and faithful Christian living, as much more important elements of successful preaching ministry than education, it might be helpful to refer to the Aristotelian concept of 'three means of persuasion', which are logos, ethos and pathos. "Logos" – covering every aspect of persuasion which appeals to reason, including logical argumentation. "Ethos" or 'ethical appeal is exerted when the speech convinces the audience that the speaker is a person of good sense, high moral character, and benevolence.' Finally "pathos" is the emotional appeal, which is achieved 'primarily by

Nonetheless, despite all the challenges and restrictions that churches were faced with, the authorities could not fully paralyse their activities in training of the new generations of preachers. A large number of pastors (among them there were many, who were able to receive training and education before the persecutions started in the late 1920-s) who were released from prisons and returned to their churches in the 1950-s, and gave a major boost to the missionary and educational activities of local churches.[123] A. Popov notices that it was common for Russian evangelicals to see their worship as a place of education, and many worshippers were used to taking notes during sermons.[124] Listening to sermons was the main way of education, as well as one of the main objectives of learning, since preaching was perceived as the most important skill that any Christian pastor could acquire.[125] Moreover, an ability to preach was considered as one of the key skills not only for pastors, but also for all other people involved in any kind of church ministry – choir directors preached during music rehearsals, youth workers used preaching at various youth events (including birthdays, weddings, picnics, etc.).

The most common way for young people to learn to preach was self-training based on listening and reflection with little, if any, assistance from "older brothers." The proverbial saying, 'God is teaching his people to preach,' was gradually becoming not only the way young people saw their ministry, but also the methodology promoted by pastors

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describing something to which the audience will naturally have an emotional reaction.' (Nancy C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Trinity Press International, 1994), pp 56-62). The approach of "scientific atheism," engaged by the authorities, closed the possibility of advanced education for Christians, and created an anti-religious image for any academic work (the "Logos" element of persuasion). Thus, the two other elements were given extra weight in Russian Baptist communities, compensating the weakness of a rational component of sermons by preachers' authority, established on their faithful Christian living, and extensive use of stories, aimed at stirring emotions of the listeners.

[123] See Walter Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoie Dvizheniie v SSSR Posle Vtoroi Mirovoi Voini [Evangelical Movement in USSR after World War II]* (Moscow, 1995), p 185.

[124] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", p 161.

[125] In his analysis of the publications in the *BV,* A. Popov argues that pastoral care (dushepopechitelstvo [counselling]) wasn't considered important, perhaps due to the lack of knowledge on what kind of training was available on the subject ("The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 164).

of churches.[126] Eventually, in a large number of congregations, the situation became a norm, where such in-house training was limited to asking every male member of a church to deliver a sermon (three or four sermons in a service provided ample opportunities for listening and preaching).[127] Whilst learning through practice is essential when it comes to preaching, such important elements of educational process as subsequent critical evaluation and feedback were hardly ever present, hence restricting the potential growth of prospective preachers to their individual meditation and reading of the Bible and any other Christian publications they could get hold of.

Conclusion

In this large chapter, I have offered an overview of a complex history of development of preaching ministry in Russian baptistic communities from the formative period, when first churches were started, through the years of relative prosperity, freedom, and subsequently their fast growth and development, and a final period of oppression and persecution of the Church by communistic authorities of the USSR. Obviously, it is nearly impossible to exhaust the field (where every historical period deserves a volume by itself) in a chapter, or even in this whole dissertation. Nonetheless, this exercise was important, since, first of all, it is a first attempt to explore Russian baptistic history through the lens of the development of their preaching. Secondly, I was able to highlight some important trends in how preaching was understood and practiced, and how this understanding changed with shifting political realities, thus bringing changes (both positive and negative) into the baptistic communities.

Let me summarise the most important points. Initially, preaching was understood to be the task of every member of the community. It was done in a form of literal interpretation and immediate application of the biblical story to the lives of

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[126] Sinichkin, "Vlast I Sluzhiteli na Etape Formirovaniia VSEKHB", p. 169.

[127] It is not uncommon to still hear about churches, where preachers are appointed only few minutes prior to the beginning of a service. A visiting "brother" may be asked to preach just before the opening prayer. Any attempt to refuse "an invitation" to the pulpit under the pretext of being not ready or not knowing how to preach is easily dismissed with words like, 'You are a Christian, don't you have thoughts to share?' or 'The Holy Spirit will give you words to say.' (This comes from my personal experience of growing up in a Baptist church in Russia).

the listeners. However, the preacher's interpretation wasn't considered to be final or inerrant. Rather, it served as a beginning of a discussion, when listeners were allowed to offer alternative insights, raise disagreements and ask questions. Preaching was a truly communal exercise!

One of the downsides of such use of the Scripture was significant variations in understanding and application of the biblical narrative. Moreover, with education becoming more available and accessible, there was a growing need to bring some theological coherence into the diverse congregations of Baptists and Evangelical Christians as well as offer training to the quickly expanding numbers of pastors and missionaries. The leadership of the two unions reacted to these challenges by (1) organising various educational opportunities for pastors and preachers, and (2) through developing publishing activities, which became an important tool of raising theological literacy, providing examples of good quality sermons, and bringing a sense of unity to congregations spread over the vast territory of the Russian Empire (and later the USSR). Preaching was gradually becoming the task for people with a special calling, gifting and preparation.

The tragic period of Communistic persecution and repressions affected all the spheres of Soviet society, penetrating and changing the lives of every family. Churches turned into targets for the police violence and atheistic propaganda. Gradually Christians were pushed to the margins of the social life, when ordinary people were embarrassed even to admit that someone in their family attended church services. For the Church it was a long battle for survival. When all educational activities were disrupted, youth work – prohibited, social involvement – banned, the only area where Christians could successfully resist communistic oppression was in their spiritual and ethical lives. The churches' main approach to teaching preaching could be summed up in two phrases - to spend more time in prayer and to read and reflect on the Bible. The next chapter will develop the subject of preaching and preparation of preachers as it appeared on the pages of the *Bratskii Vestnik.*

CHAPTER 4. Preaching and *Bratskii Vestnik*

Introduction

Chapter 4 will continue to explore the history of the Russian baptistic movement and, particularly the development of preaching during the period of communistic oppression and persecutions. Although it may seem as a continuation of Chapter 3, I felt it was appropriate to put this material into a separate chapter, since my main focus will be on published materials, and specifically, on the official journal of the Baptist Union – *Bratskii Vestnik*. The importance and influence of this media is difficult to overestimate, since until 1968 when the Bible Correspondent Courses (BCC) started to work, the only resource available to churches and individual preachers were publications in the *BV*. In his recent work, A. Popov offered an in-depth analysis of the way the Bible was used in the *BV* and addressed aspects of the identity of Baptists in the Soviet Union.[1]

In this section of my research, I will offer an overview of articles on preaching and preachers that appeared on the pages of the *BV.* Since through most of the Soviet era no other materials on the subject were available to churches and individual preachers, the *BV* played an extremely important role in shaping the understanding of various aspects of preaching ministry. However, prior to addressing preaching itself, it might be helpful to start with a wider subject of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis.

4.1 Biblical exegesis in post-war communities

I have already touched upon the issue of how the Bible was used in early baptistic communities in Russia. At this stage, it might be helpful to return to the subject of biblical hermeneutics in Russian Baptist churches in the post-World War II era. I have already stated that the Bible has always been of paramount importance for Russian Baptists. People learnt to see almost every aspect of their personal and ecclesial life through the lens of the Bible. Hence, as A. Popov notices, 'This is why the quest for sound biblical teaching constituted the main task of any research project of ECB "scholars".'[2] However, despite all the emphasis on the Bible as the source and foundation of Christian faith, the subject of how to read and interpret the Bible

[1] "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as Hermeneutical Community."

[2] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", p 99.

received surprisingly little attention. There was a simple reason for such a neglect – a strong belief that any born-again believer had the ability to understand the Holy Book, which was given by the Holy Spirit.

In itself, this conviction was not drastically different from biblical literalism of the first communities of Evangelical Christians, Stundists or Baptists. As with the congregations of the AUCECB the main change, however, was in the emphasis on the need for the interpreter to belong to the church, which had the final authority in accepting or rejecting the message, being the only agent that possessed the fullness of the knowledge of the Word. Whilst such "congregational approval" may appear as a sound practice of communal discernment, in reality the ultimate authority in matters of faith was given to the leadership of local churches. Thus, it was a step away from truly communal reading of the Scripture and towards uncritical reception of any message proclaimed by the preacher.

Ivan I. Motorin[3] wrote a number of articles on biblical subjects, which appeared in the *BV* in 1946-1947. Although his articles resemble sermons both in style and content, they are still very helpful in shedding light on the role and the use of biblical text. The first article was entitled "Bible – the Word of God." After initial introduction about the Bible being the only foundation of Christian faith, and the only source of our knowledge about God, the author sets clear criteria for the reader/interpreter, 'God reveals Himself only to those, whose hearts are clear, whether it is a heart of an ignorant person or a wise man. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God," says Jesus Christ.' Another crucial element of biblical interpretation is belonging to the church, as 'the fullness of God, and the greatness of His love opens only in the Church of Christ.' Finally, the in-depth study of the Bible leads the reader to the discovery of the fullness of spiritual life.[4]

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[33] Ivan I. Motorin was one of the leaders of the ARUEC and later the AUCECB. In 1924 he became the leader of the Union of Evangelical Christians in Ukraine. During this time he supervised publications of the journal *Evangelist.* In 1944 he participated in the discussions, leading to the formation of the AUCECB. In 1966 Motorin was elected into the General Council of the AUCECB.

[4] Ivan I. Motorin, "Bibliia – Slovo Bozhiie" ["Bible – the Word of God"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 4 (1946), pp 4-5.

Motorin's second article, "How to study the Bible," begins with words about the necessity not only to read, but to study the Bible. Then he offers an insight into how not to study the Bible. According to him, there are several wrong ways of approaching the Bible. First - through the lens of the Tradition. Motorin insists that trying to read the Bible through the teaching of the Church Fathers [startsev] leads to stripping the Bible of its power to reveal the crucified Christ, thus making such an exercise not only useless, but even harmful.[5] The second approach to avoid is what he compares to the work of Scribes and Pharisees of the 1st century or 'modernist theologians' of his time. These 'modernist theologians' are those people who study the Bible in seminaries and universities, having great knowledge but missing the most important element – personal regeneration. Since they 'study the Bible not like God's revelation, but as they would study any other human book' such method is considered as 'exceptionally harmful.'[6]

In the next section under the heading "How the Bible should be studied" Motorin offers a number of proposals. The first and the most significant aspect of biblical interpretation is that: the Bible 'should be studied diligently, with especial eagerness and reverence, and most importantly, with prayer.' Other suggestions include (1) to read the whole Bible; (2) to study the Bible topically (and to read 'available reference books'); (3) to study different sections of the Bible (e.g. the Gospels, the Torah, etc.); (4) make notes, but most importantly 'pray and reflect.' Only this allows the reader to 'enrich themselves with the divine truth and the knowledge of the eternal Word.' (5) The use of the concordance is recommended. Finally (6) sharing the insights with sisters and brothers is considered a good practice, since this is the way to deepen the knowledge of the Bible and to receive necessary

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[5] Later Motorin argues that, when studying the Bible, it is helpful to consider the rich heritage left to us by 'men of faith and workers of God's field', since it contains 'a lot of valuable and precious material.' These 'men of faith' are 'Tertullian, Origen, Vasilii, Grigorii, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and others.' Such people of our time are Spurgeon, Moody, Torrey, Kargel and Prokhanov ("Kak Izuchat Bibliyu" ["How to study the Bible"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5 (1947), p 58). Thus, he does not reject the use of tradition as an interpretive tool. Most likely, the negative reference to the 'tradition of the elders' is a lunge against the Orthodox Church, which was always critical of Baptists primarily for their rejection of the Church Tradition.

[6] Motorin, "Kak Izuchat Bibliyu," p 58.

corrections, as the fullness of biblical knowledge and of discernment of God's will resides with the 'universal Church, which is the gathering of the saints.'[7] Yet, as A. Popov notices, 'there is little awareness of the universal church beyond the AUCECB, in the concrete historical setting about which he is writing.'[8]

Exegetika [*Exegetics*], a handbook of the BCC on Exegesis written by Alexander V. Karev,[9] Artur I. Mitskevich[10] and V. Popov,[11] was the next significant work on the subject of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis produced by the AUCECB. According to the authors of *Exegetika,* the person of Jesus Christ is the key to reading and interpreting the Scripture. It says, 'The Holy Scriptures with all its immensity is composed following one plan – to testify about Jesus Christ. Therefore, an exegete must everywhere and always seek and see Jesus Christ, and hold His direction (John 16,14).'[12] Most of the Bible is considered to be simple and clear for understanding,

> How should the Scripture be understood? What meaning do the words of the Scripture hold? In response to this it can be said that above all, the Scripture should be understood just as it is written, which means all the words should be understood in their common sense, without over-intellectualizing. No doubt, God said in His Word exactly what He wanted to say.[13]

The authors recognise, however, that not all passages can be interpreted literally. Hence, the reader of the Bible must be able to recognise different types of meaning of biblical text – literal and spiritual (spiritual meaning can be either metaphorical or prototypical).

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[7] Ibid., p 60.

[8] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", p 102.

[9] Alexander V. Karev served as a General Secretary of AUCECB from 1944 until his death in 1971. Also he was a General Editor of *Bratskii Vestnik.*

[10] Artur I. Mitskevich served as a Starshii Presviter [senior pastor] of Ukraine (1946-1956), in 1956 he became a Vice General Secretary of AUCECB. He served as a Director of BCC from 1968.

[11] V. Popov was a pastor of a local church and one of the teachers at BCC.

[12] A. Karev, A. Mitskevich, V. Popov, *Ekzegetika* [Exegesis] (Moscow: VSEKHB), p.4.

[13] Ibid., p.5.

The handbook suggested two types of interpretive tools – analytical and auxiliary. Analytical tools include the definition of the purpose of the book or a passage, the meaning of words and phrases, understanding the context, and biblical parallelism ('which is juxtaposition of two or more similar passages of the Holy Scripture in order to explain texts difficult for understanding').[14] Auxiliary resources are information about the author of the book, its characters, the time and place when the book was written, and its purpose. It is suggested that most of this information can be received from the Bible itself, although additional knowledge can be obtained from the works of Christian theologians from the first four centuries.[15] All of this highlights an important hermeneutical principle – the Bible is interpreted by the Bible itself.[16]

Similar to the articles of Motorin, the authors of *Exegetika* also address the issue of who can interpret the Bible. After various aspects of biblical text were taken into consideration, there is 'one final condition, which is the most important – an interpreter must be a child of God. Only such an interpreter possesses gifts which give him assurance in the work of interpretation.' The authors then explain that differences of interpretations or even disagreements between the believers can occur if (1) there was no true regeneration of the interpreters; (2) due to the diversity of their life experiences and (3) existing differences in the level of their spiritual maturity. [17] As A. Popov noticed, 'In practice, the demand of spirituality and holiness in the interpreters meant conformity of their interpretation to ideals, norms, and standards accepted among the "holy people."'[18]

4.2 *Bratskii Vestnik* on preaching

BV played an important role in the Baptist churches of the USSR, being the primary and often the only instrument of developing preachers in local churches. A. Popov wrote,

> Spiritual articles, most of which were written specially for *BV* were the most valuable element of the journal. When spiritual literature was unreachable for

[14] Ibid., pp 10, 12-17.

[15] Ibid., pp 17-21.

[16] Ibid., p 6.

[17] Ibid., p 10.

[18] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", p 110.

> the majority of believers, the journal gave often the only opportunity to get acquainted with sermons and spiritual articles, of highest quality… *BV's* educational aim was very important. It is a known fact that from early 30-s and until 1968 there were no evangelical educational institutions in the USSR. *BV* took on the role of both Sunday school and seminary. It published encyclopedic materials… The lectures for Correspondent Bible Courses were published in *BV* approximately two years before the opening of this educational institution, thus offering a wide circle of readers an opportunity to receive robust spiritual education…[19]

It must be noted, however, that despite the importance attributed to preaching in churches,[20] the journal does not contain a significant number of articles on the subject of homiletics.[21] Hence, it might be helpful to once again point out the main approach to teaching preaching appropriated by churches (due to various external factors, which were mentioned earlier in the chapter) was by offering example. Inexperienced preachers had ample opportunities of listening to more mature practitioners and were expected to imitate their style. Unsurprisingly, each issue of the *BV* contained several sermons of well-known pastors, union leaders (past and present) or some famous preachers (like Spurgeon) from abroad.[22] This served several purposes – it brought some theological and doctrinal coherence into diverse congregations; offered material for sermons; and provided examples of how preaching should be done. The main weakness of such method was the absence of any critical assessment or analysis of both written "exemplary sermons" and oral acts of proclamation. Young

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[19] Alexander Popov, "Traditsii Izdatelstva VSEKHB v Zhurnale "Bratskii Vestnik"" ["The Traditions of Publication of AUCECB in *Bratskii Vestnik"*] (2007), accessed on 01.10.2014, from www.rosbaptist.ru.

[20] E.g., 'Preaching is the most important ministry of a spiritual labourer on God's field… Moving preaching to the background, he, therefore, lowers himself to a position of a human being who lost his true mission.' (N. N., "Rabota nad Propovediami" ["Work on Sermons"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5 (1969), p 52).

[21] From 1945 to 1989 (the period covered in this overview), there were less than 15 articles dedicated to the subject of preaching. A few publications on pastoral ministry touch upon the theme of preaching as well.

[22] E.g. Sermons by P. Malin, Prokhanov, Andreev and I.R. (Vol. 1, 1948, pp 29-46.)

(and old) preachers were left to themselves in dealing with various issues related to preparation and delivery of sermons.

Turning to the *BV* to research the subject of preaching, it would come as an unexpected (and to some even unpleasant) surprise to a large number of pastors in Russia, but the first article specifically dealing with preaching (Vol. 3, 1945) relates to the question of the role of women in this ministry. The author insists that since 'the spiritual condition of the churches largely depends on the condition of the sisters, the question of female ministry should be considered as very important.' The argument against women in preaching based on Paul's prohibition for women to speak in churches (1 Cor. 14:34) is dismissed through a number of references to Paul's other letters (1 Cor. 11,5; Phil. 4:2-3), the book of Acts (2:17; 7:1-6), and the Gospel of Luke (the prophecy of Anna in Luke 2:38). The author concludes, 'All of the above makes it clear that women can serve on the field of preaching the Gospel.'[23]

The subsequent volumes of the journal do not show a change of attitude to this issue. At the beginning of 1948, Yakov I. Zhidkov[24] offers an overview of church-life in 1947 where he routinely mentions female preachers. 'Under the guidance of the beloved brother – the presbyter, some gifted brothers and sisters participated by sharing the word of holy Gospel. They read the Holy Scripture and explained what was read, applying it to Christian living.'[25] These words indicate that women were allowed to preach, and such practice was not considered as unbiblical or sinful, which is prevalent in the churches of the 21st century.[26] Ten years later Zhidkov in his article "Poriadok Propovedi Na Nashikh Sluzheniiakh" [The Order of Preaching in Our Services] reaffirms the notion of female preaching. Referring to the decision approved by the leadership of the Union, he wrote, 'Those brothers and sisters that

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[23] "O Sluzhenii Zhenshchin v Tserkvi" ["Regarding Women's Ministry in the Church"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 3 (1945), pp 48-49.

[24] Yakov I. Zhidkov was one of the key Baptist leaders in Russia. He served as a president of ARUEC after Prokhanov's immigration in 1928. From 1932 until 1942 he was in prison for his religious work. In 1944 Zhidkov was elected as a President of AUCECB. In 1955 Zhidkov was elected as a Vice-President of the World Baptist Alliance (BWA) (re-elected in 1960).

[25] Yakov I. Zhidkov, "Vzgliad Nazad" ["Retrospect"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 1 (1948), p 7.

[26] For further discussion on this subject see Chapter 5 of this research.

are gifted and able to teach the church are allowed to preach, apart from the presbyter and the deacons.'[27]

Other publications can be mostly divided into two categories, dealing primarily with the character of the preacher, or issues related to the sermon preparation. It must be noted that the first theme was given much more attention, as almost every article contains extensive exhortation on the need to spend time in prayer before, during and after the process of preparation for preaching, the importance of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and, thus prophetic nature of preaching. Now I am going to offer a brief overview of these publications that address the subject of preaching and preachers. The theme of preaching being more than a mere rhetorical discourse clearly comes to the forefront in the publications of the *BV*. Despite some mild attempts to address practical issues related to the ministry of the word, the preachers and the listeners were given a clear message – the right heart of a preacher, and his[28] relationship with God are the most important elements for a successful sermon. Therefore, the task and responsibility of the listeners is to come prepared not only to listen, but more importantly to hear God's message.

The two articles by Prokhanov dealing with questions of a preacher's character appeared in 1946. Prokhanov argued that preaching ministry should only be open to those who 'meet the criteria set by the Word of God,' otherwise Christian preaching loses its ability to influence people. According to the author, there are four qualities that every preacher must possess.[29] The first is conversion. The power of personal

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[27] Yakov I. Zhidkov, "Poriadok Propovedi Na Nashikh Sluzheniiakh" ["The Order of Preaching in Our Services"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 3-4 (1955).

[28] It might be worth noting that despite the previously noted "official position" of the Baptist Union and the *BV* on women in preaching, its subsequent publications always referred to preachers using the masculine pronoun "he." Similarly, women-preachers never appeared on its pages as examples for others (unlike male preachers, such as Prokhanov, Kargel and many others).

[29] The second article, based on Prokhanov's writings, addresses vices that preachers must avoid and suppress. These include spiritual laziness, pride, favouritism, pretentious scholasticism (which meant the use of big words and complicated sentences, as well as numerous references to well-known scientists and writers), gloomy and unwelcoming appearance, greed and mercenariness, and finally neglect of their family life and relationship (Ivan S. Prokhanov, "Poroki Propovednikov" ["Vices of Preachers"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5 (1946), pp 47-50).

experience of accepting Christ and turning away from sin is directly linked to the convictional power of proclamation. Without such spiritual experience, biblical and theological knowledge is considered to be lifeless scholasticism. The second quality is calling. The calling of a preacher is confirmed by their preaching gifts. The confirmation of giftedness, however, comes from a church, and not from a preacher. The knowledge of the Bible is a third quality. Such knowledge is different from 'theological theories' and other religious knowledge. Prokhanov believes that every preacher must try to memorize large bits of the Bible, which also would be a natural result of constant reflection on the Bible and its daily application. The final characteristic is a preacher's life. 'A preacher must be an example for other believers 'in word, in life, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity' (2 Tim 2:15).'[30]

The editors of the *BV* used Prokhanov's heritage rather extensively – his sermons, articles (on preaching and other subjects), and even his preaching style were set as an example for other preachers. The article "I. S. Prokhanov kak Propovednik" [I. S. Prokhanov as a Preacher] is a lengthy analysis of his preaching style, full of flowery metaphors and flattering comparisons (Prokhanov as a preacher was compared and considered to be superior to Spurgeon, Moody and Torrey). However, this ode to the 'greatest and most gifted preachers not only of our country [Russia], but of all countries in the world' sets a number of important emphases, which helps to understand what was expected of a sermon. The proclamation of the Gospel, understood as a call to repentance, was the first and foremost purpose of a sermon. Every sermon 'must contain a reference to the crucified Christ.'[31] Although the author indicates that as well as aiming at bringing people to repentance, preaching must also contain 'food for mind and heart,' yet the examples of the fruits of Prokhanov's sermons were always stories of people accepting Christ as their Saviour, asking for forgiveness, and bursting out in public prayers.[32] Therefore a sermon was first of all a tool for outreach and evangelism.

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[30] Ivan S. Prokhanov, "Kachestva Propovednika" ["Qualities of a Preacher"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 4 (1946), pp 18-21.

[31] N. N., "I. S. Prokhanov kak Propovednik" ["I. S. Prokhanov as a Preacher"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 1 (1947), pp 68-69.

[32] Ibid., p 70.

The article entitled "Nekotoriie Ukazaniia o Tom, Kak Gotovitsia K Propovedi" [Some Instructions on How to Prepare for Preaching] again places significant emphases on the spiritual condition of a preacher. The Word of God is the first requirement for preaching, because 'The Word of God is the subject of every sermon, it is 'living and acting' and is meant to strengthen the faith of the believers and to awake consciousness in sinners.' Apart from the Bible, a preacher needs the help of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, no correct interpretation or application of the Scriptures is possible. Therefore, the process of preparation should start and end with a lot of prayer.[33] The author of the article addresses such questions as preparation (which is deemed to be very important), reading of the commentaries (indicating that reading parallel passages is the best way to understand the Scriptures, since 'the Bible itself is the best interpreter'), creating some structure and following one theme.[34] However, such practical pieces of advice do not distract the reader from the main idea - preaching is presented as a prophetic ministry empowered through the work of the Holy Spirit.

> After the draft of the sermon is ready, you need to throw it to the feet of Jesus and fall in front of Him. Your notes are just dead bones, which lack flesh and, which is more important – life and spirit, the source of which is in God's hand. Pray to Him that in every moment of your sermon you, according to His promises, were given necessary thoughts in your heart and the words of life were put in your mouth. The best preparation for a public speaking before people is in prior private conversation with God. Talking to Him is the best preparation for the testimony about Him.[35]

In 1954 the *BV* publishes an article by Motorin, "Sluzheniie Propovednika [Preacher's ministry]. The author sets himself to address a problem – in many churches preaching lacks power, does not satisfy the listeners, and pastors are not able to provide example through their ministry. In order to deal with these issues, preachers are advised to first of all prepare for the event. Motorin rebukes those who reject

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[33] "Nekotoriie Ukazaniia o Tom, Kak Gotovitsia K Propovedi" ["Some Instructions on How to Prepare for Preaching"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 2 (1948), p 53.

[34] Ibid., pp 54-56.

[35] Ibid., pp 56-57.

preparation on the basis of Matthew 10:19-20.[36] He reminds readers that the passage relates to a court-room, and not to a context of a local church. Hence, preparation for 'teaching' and 'edification' is a must. Morotin's recommendations on how to prepare a sermon can be divided into three categories: (1) spiritual, (2) stylistic, and (3) structural. Spiritual preparation involves reflection on a specific passage, as well as prayer. Stylistic preparation highlights the need to be aware of gestures, choice of words, intonation, and general 'appropriateness' of a preacher in a pulpit. Those whose character or preaching style does not conform to 1 Peter 4:11, 'If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God,' are told to be banned from this ministry.[37] Structural preparation highlights the need to have preaching notes. Motorin argues the case for the use of notes using the examples of Prokhanov, Kargel and Pavlov, 'who never preached without notes.' The use of preaching notes is considered important, since it helps preachers to maintain clarity of thought and direction all through the sermon. Finally, preachers and pastors are advised to use publications from the *BV* in their preaching.[38]

A year later, a similar piece by V. S. Schavelin, a preacher and the author of many publications in the *BV,* entitled "Chto Dolzhen Znat Propovednik" ["What a Preacher Must Know"] addressed the same issues as preparation (mainly through prayer and meditation), style and length of a sermon. However, the author places much heavier emphasis on the supernatural nature of preaching. The main themes of the article can be formulated through these quotations, 'The preacher who is not in Christ always risks in his sermon to deviate from what the Holy Spirit wants…' and 'Each preacher must daily, with prayer, immerse himself into the abyss of God's wisdom and guidance.' All the subsequent promptings to 'prepare,' 'be sensitive to the listeners,' 'notice your audience' are not substantiated in any way, which conveys a clear message: the "right heart" and solid relationships with God will

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[36] Matthew 10:19-20: '…do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'

[37] Ivan Motorin, "Sluzheniie Propovednika" ["Preacher's ministry"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 1), 1954), pp 43-44.

[38] Ibid., p 46.

inevitably produce an edifying message, that speaks to the hearts of the listeners, prompting their prayers.[39]

Based on this recommendation for preachers to use the *BV* as a source for their preaching, the subsequent issues of the journal regularly feature such sections as "V Pomoshch Propovednikam" [To Assist Preachers] and "Misli dlia Propovednikov" [Thoughts for Preachers]. These sections contained Karev's notes for sermons, offering the preachers around the Soviet Union ready-made materials for their use in churches.[40]

Zhidkov's article "Poriadok Propovedi Na Nashikh Sluzheniiakh" creates a framework for preaching in Baptist churches. All the recommendations are explicitly based on the document adopted by the council of AUCECB. The reason for such instruction is stated in a following way, 'We have to give guidance to our brothers, involved in the ministry of the word, so that the churches would receive sufficient amount of spiritual food.' References to 1 Tim 4:11 and 1 Tim 6:2-5 are used to provide biblical backing to the above mentioned guidlines. It needs to be pointed out that some of the suggested recommendations have to be seen in light of the growing pressure from the Soviet authorities in their push to impose greater control over the practices of the Church. Zhidkov states the following recommendations:

- It is clearly defined who is allowed to preach: apart from the pastor and the deacons, some brothers and sisters whose gifts are recognized by the church. These people have to be members in their churches as it is inadvisable to allow visitors to have access to the pulpit.
- Criticism of other religious movements or Christian denominations is prohibited.
- The New Testament is suggested as a primary source for preaching, whilst preaching on the book of Revelation and the Old Testament is discouraged (unless

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[39] V. S. Schavelin, "Chto Dolzhen Znat Propovednik" ["What a Preacher Must Know"], in *Bratskii Vestnik*, Vol. 3-4 (1955).

[40] Alexander V. Karev, "V Pomoshch Propovednikam" ["To Assist Preachers"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 2 (1954), pp 65-79. Also Karev, "Misli dlia Propovednikov" ["Thoughts for Preachers"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5 and 6, 1954, pp 122-136; Vol. 5, 1955, pp 68-78; Vol. 1, 1956, pp 60-69; Vol. 3-4, 1956, pp 110-127; Vol. 5, 1956, pp 69-77; Vol.2, 1957, pp 68-79; Vol. 1, 1958, pp 65-79; Vol. 3, 1958, pp 53-70.

the preacher uses passages 'which are clear and do not require especial preparation for their interpretation').

- The use of stories and personal examples in preaching is commended, yet with a word of caution – stories have to be 'appropriate, conforming to the serious spiritual content of a sermon.'
- Every preacher has to prepare for a preaching event with much prayer and 'all seriousness, since believers expect to hear from him spiritual word, as from the Lord…'[41]

Bratskii Vestnik, Vol. 2, 1958, features an article written by Charles H. Spurgeon "Rabota Presvitera I Propovednika Nad Soboi" [The Work of the Pastor and the Preacher on Himself]. The author's main idea is to stress the need for a preacher to have the right heart and relationship with God, and for the preacher's life to fully reflect the message he is proclaiming. Accorgind to Spurgeon, all the hard work in such areas as rhetoric, logic, and knowledge 'are secondary tools of [a preacher's] holy calling' since 'the main tools are my inner man, my reason, and my body. My spiritual abilities and my inner spiritual life – these are my true tool in this high calling.'[42]

The notion of preaching being primarily a result of the work of the Holy Spirit is further developed in the instructions to pastors. E. Masin in "Presviter Dolzhen Bit Osviashchen Gospodom" [A Presbyter Must Be Sanctified by God], apart from addressing the qualities of a pastor as a person who is guided, sanctified and anointed by the Holy Spirit (thus indicating that pastors have a special position in churches, different from the lay members), speaks on the subject of preaching. The ministry of proclamation is compared to the ministry of the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New Testament. The prophetic word is 'God speaking to the people of God,' also it is 'the direction to the church, the light that shines in the darkness.' The ministry of a pastor is explicitly identified with the ministry of the prophets,

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[41] Zhidkov, "Poriadok Propovedi Na Nashikh Sluzheniiakh."

[42] C. H. Spurgeon "Rabota Presvitera i Propovednika Nad Soboi" ["The Work of the Pastor and the Preacher on Himself"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 2 (1958), p 30. (Originally published in C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students: A Selection From Addresses Delivered to the Students of The Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle,* Chapter 1, "The Minister's self-watch," (London, Passmore and Alabaster, 1876).

> The Lord puts people to serve churches, people who have fiery testimony about Jesus, whose inspired words are filled with testimony about Christ (Rev. 19.10), just like the Old Testament prophets were teachers for the nation of Israel, in a similar way the pastors' ministry is to care about spiritual well-being of the members.[43]

Such a high view of preaching is reinforced by Mitskevich in "Vseobshcheie Sviashchenstvo i Sluzhiteli Tserkvi" [Priesthood of All Believers and Church Ministers]. The instructions on how church members should listen to sermons are worth an extensive quote, because this message has become a regular theme for sermons in churches across the Soviet Union (and even today's Russia), first of all emphasising the responsibility of the listeners in discerning the message of the preacher.[44]

> 'Watch, how you are listening,' – said Jesus in Luke 8:18. Through preaching God performs His gospel seeding. Be watchful, open the ears of your heart, hear and reflect. Be like Mary at Jesus' feet, place in your heart the seeds of eternal life. Do not sleep or doze, so that the evil one would not steal the seed planted in your heart (Matthew 13:19). Do not let your heart become a transit road for various unclean or vain thoughts. Find pearls in what was said, wonderful truths, draw lessons not only for others, but also for your personal life. Do not set your heart for criticism or judgment. Reject everything which stands in the way of your reverent fellowship with Jesus, open your heart to Him, to receive new purification

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[43] E. Masin in "Presviter Dolzhen Bit Osviashchen Gospodom" ["Presbyter Must Be Sanctified by God"], *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol.2 (1959), pp 58-59.

[44] Growing up in a Baptist church in Voronezh, I still have a vivid memory of a conversation I once had with my father. At the end of a very boring sermon, which as a teenager I found extremely difficult to sit through, the preacher left the pulpit with final "edification" for the listeners. He said, 'If you do not find the sermon useful or helpful for your spiritual development, you need to pray more, asking God to open your spiritual eyes.' The comment I made to my father was about similarities of these words to the famous fairy-tale By Hans C. Andersen, *Emperor's New Clothes,* where shrewd swindlers made the emperor walk naked, convincing him and his court that everyone who could not see the 'beautiful dress' was stupid and incompetent.

and sanctification, new joy and edification, new blessing for the continuation of your journey.[45]

An extensive article by Sergei P. Fadyukhin's,[46] "Sovety Propovednikam" [Recommendations to Preachers], can be seen as a sum total of the previous published materials.[47] It is divided into three separate parts, each covering an important area of preaching ministry. Like most other preaching publications, it opens with the person of a preacher. The author states that the preacher's integrity and personal experience are paramount for preaching ministry. 'The preacher is first of all a witness for Jesus Christ, which is why everything he says to his listeners must be known to him through personal experience… We, preachers, have no moral right to speak about something we haven't lived through.' The person cannot be a preacher unless he had 'personal spiritual meeting with Christ' and Christ's personality is reflected in his life.[48]

The preacher's good knowledge of the Bible is included in the list of important qualities. His growth in knowledge and understanding of the Bible first of all happens through reading and reflecting on the Scripture, and then presenting one's thoughts to 'senior, more experienced brothers.' Other steps to deeper understanding of biblical texts include understanding the context in which a particular text was written, and reading parallel passages, since 'the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.'[49] According to Fadyukhin the purpose of every sermon should be 'repentance, revival, and strengthening of faith.' 'The cross of Golgotha must be clearly seen as the centre

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[45] A. I. Mitskevich "Vseobshcheie Sviashchenstvo i Sluzhiteli Tserkvi" ["Priesthood of All Believers and Church Ministers"], *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 3 (1965), pp 30-31.

[46] Sergei P. Fadyukhin was a pastor of Leningrad Baptist church in 1966-1980.

[47] *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5, 1969 features an article by N.N., "Rabota nad Propovediami" ["Work on Sermons"]. However, this publication can be seen as a summary of Fadyukhin's article, so I would not comment on it further.

[48] S. P. Fadyukhin, "Sovety Propovednikam" ["Recommendations to Preachers"], in *Bratskii Vestnik,* Vol. 5 (1965), pp 33-34.

[49] Ibid., p 35.

of every sermon, because it is Christ, crucified for our sins, who is a Magnet drawing the hearts of those who see themselves as sinners.'[50]

The second part of the article features the term "homiletics" for the first time in the publications of the *BV*. The author sets himself to address the task of homiletics, which he defines as developing and honing natural gifts of preachers such as the gift of public speaking and clear logical thinking. The preachers are advised on the choice of preaching texts and recommended to use one of three forms of preaching. These forms are a homily (verse by verse explanation of the biblical text); the second form is also a verse by verse explanation, but with greater emphasis on one main idea. The third type of a sermon is preaching on a particular theme, which is deemed to be the preferred choice, yet also the most difficult one, since it requires preacher's extensive knowledge of the subject and ability to present his thoughts in a clear logical sequence.[51]

The final part deals with various questions related to a sermon preparation, such as the choice of preaching theme, understanding the audience, developing sermon notes, the length of a sermon, and the preacher's behaviour in the pulpit. However, despite some very helpful and practical comments (e.g. the preachers are encouraged to welcome criticism, as it helps them to grow in their ministry), the main idea re-emphasizes the prevalent spiritualised view of preaching. Fadyukhin writes on the choice of preaching text,

> Each biblical text has rich content, for it is God's Word. However, if when you consider it, you see that although this passage is beautiful this beauty seems vague, leave the passage – this is not the text that God wants you to take for your sermon. The text gifted to you from God will be clear for your understanding and deep in its content.[52]

He also offers a number of recommendations that an experienced preacher could give to someone starting this ministry:

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[50] Ibid., p 36.

[51] Ibid., pp 37-38.

[52] Ibid., p 41.

1. Call to the Lord: 'Open my eyes and I will see the wonders of your Law.' (Ps. 118, 18);
2. Choose a text;
3. Think about it;
4. Analyse it;
5. Seal it in memory;
6. Remember that Christ must be in the centre of the sermon, 'We preach Jesus Christ crucified…' (1 Cor. 1, 23)
7. Remain in constant prayer about your sermon;
8. Look for examples, 'All of it Jesus spoke through parables and without parables did not speak to them' (Matthew 13, 34);
9. Limit: 'In many words you won't avoid sin, but the one that holds his lips' (Prov. 10,19);
10. Everything you think about must be submitted to the Lord, 'Submit to the Lord your way, rely on Him, and He will accomplish' (Ps. 36,5).[53]

A short summary of the chapter might be required at this stage. I have offered an overview of all the publications of the *BV* that addressed preaching and the personality of preachers covering the period from 1945 to 1969. Most of them conveyed a rather unambiguous message – the most important thing in preaching is the spirituality of a preacher. Personal spiritual experience, passion for Christ, time spent in prayer and reflection on the Word, as well as genuine desire to see people saved – these were the main prerequisites for a successful sermon. In turn, the listeners were taught that discovering precious pearls of God's truths was their direct responsibility when listening to preaching. Active listening (with prayer and reflection prior to the worship service) was encouraged, moreover, made a requirement for a successful sermon.

Although the majority of contemporary Christian preachers would emphasize the importance of prayer, reflection and God's guidance in the process of sermon preparation, the over-spiritualization of the practice that can be observed in the publications of the *BV* eventually led to lower standards of preaching and teaching in churches, as well as opened the doors for the abuse of power, since preachers, and

[53] Ibid. (The biblical passages are translated from Russian).

particularly pastors, were given a special status of "God's anointed people," thus were exempt from any accountability. The leadership of the Baptist Union was aware of the problems. Their dissatisfaction with the state of preaching in churches can be seen through a number of publications, trying to deal with the problem of poor preaching by addressing such questions as sermon preparation, structure, and style of delivery, as well as by offering sets of sermon notes already prepared for the use in churches. Yet most of the recommendations these articles brought forward, such as to have clear structure in sermons, read commentaries, observe the reaction of the listeners, only highlighted the need to rely on the Holy Spirit in preparation, since no commentaries were available, the correct understanding and application of the Bible depended on the revelation of the Holy Spirit,[54] and the listeners were expected to make their own sense of what the preacher proclaimed.

After 1969, there was a period of seventeen years (until 1986) before the next article on preaching appeared in the *BV.* In order to understand such an apparent gap in dealing with an important issue, it would be helpful to address some of the matters the AUCECB had to deal, both within its churches and outside of them. The sixties turned out to be turbulent years for the Baptist union. The approval of the controversial by-laws and the Instructional letter to senior presbyters in 1959 was the opening of a Pandora's box.[55] As Karev said at the Congress of the Baptist Union in

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[54] See previous discussion on exegesis in post-war Baptist communities.

[55] Under the pressure of the Soviet authorities, in 1959 the council of the AUCECB adopted two divisive documents, "Polozheniie o Soyuze Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov v SSSR" ["The By-Laws of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in USSR"] and "Instruktivnoie Pismo Starshim Presviteram" ["Instructional Letter to Senior Presbyters"]. Although these regulations, imposed by the Soviet authorities, clearly attempted to restrict the growth in local churches, they were approved and sent out to local churches.

Some of the most controversial points were as follows: (1) local churches were excluded from the election of the members of the General Council of AUCECB, (2) prohibition to the Superintendents (Senior Presbyters) to participate in worship services on their visits to churches, (3) suggestion to restrict baptisms for people under 30 years of age, (4) effectively a ban on evangelism and call to repentance during worship services, (5) prohibition for individual Christians to participate in any religious activity outside of the registered church premises, and (6) rejection of people who were baptised by pastors/evangelists not recognised by the AUCECB.

1961, 'The storm that started in August 1961 surpassed all previous expectations.' The split in the union, the dissent of hundreds of churches and thousands of believers caused a significant shortage of qualified pastors and preachers.[56] Several newly appointed senior presbyters lacked both theological training and experience in church ministry. There was a growing number of churches with problems caused by senior presbyters abusing power, doctrinal dissidence and various other worrying issues.[57]

The leadership of the AUCECB saw part of the solution in offering theological education and ministerial training to its pastors and lay members. In 1964, the leadership of the Baptist Union applied for permission to publish 10,000 Bibles and to open BCC, which was granted. Thus, the first educational institution of AUCECB began to operate in February 1968. Most of the 100 students that were enrolled into the programme had various roles in their churches – senior presbyters, pastors, deacons, preachers. The two-year course included such disciplines as Doctrinal theology, Introduction into the Old and New Testaments, Homiletics[58], Exegesis, History of Christianity, History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and others. During the period of 20 years (from the day it was opened) until the opening of Odessa Theological Seminary in

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The introduction of these documents and rules caused a split in the AUCECB and the appearance of the independent Baptist Union – the Council of Churches. In 1963, these by-laws were annulled, and at the AUCECB congress in 1966 the leadership of the union issued public repentance. Nevertheless, until the present moment, the relationship between the churches of the Baptist Union and the Council of Churches has not been fully healed. (*Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR [The History of the Evangelical Christians-baptists in the USSR]* (Moscow, VSEKHB, 1989), pp 240-241).

[56] It might be necessary to reiterate that a very brief introduction of such an important event in the history of Russian Baptists as a split in the AUCECB of 1961 and the appearance of the CCECB was intentional. Due to the limitations of this work, I chose to trace the development of preaching in a group of Baptist churches that remained part of the AUCECB (and formed the RUECB in the post-Soviet Russia). The development of preaching in the communities of the CCECB, their publishing activities and ecclesial life deserve to be the focus of a separate research.

[57] *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR*, Chapter 7.

[58] According to A. Popov, *Gomiletica [Homiletics],* a textbook written for BCC was an adaptation of Prokhanov's book, which in turn was an adaptation of C. H. Spurgeon's book *Lectures to my Students: a selection from addresses delivered to the students of The Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle,* London, Passmore and Alabaster, 1876. ("The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 183).

1989, the BCC remained the only educational institution for the Baptist Union, with over 1000 students graduating through their programme.[59]

1971 brought another major change. A. Bychkov was elected as a General Secretary of the Baptist Union after the death of Karev. As A. Popov noted,

> The death of Karev meant a complete shift of generations among the ECB leaders. Pastors who had seen the evangelical revival of the 1920s, had survived the Great Purge,[60] and had laid the foundation of the AUCECB, were now succeeded by ministers raised during the post-war period. The new board of the AUCECB consisted of leaders for whom the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was the only form of the evangelical movement they knew. On the one hand, the new leaders venerated their ancestors as those who had succeeded in raising the brotherhood from ruins to relative prosperity twice, after the October Revolution and later after World War II. Thus they showed extreme conservatism in almost all spheres of life, notably worship style.[61]

This conservatism that A. Popov refers to resulted in almost a total absence of educational materials in the *BV* during 1971-1988. The lack of theological education of the leadership of the union caused even greater emphasis on the value of spiritual formation, even at the expense of theological training, which can be clearly observed in preaching.[62]

Conclusion

This chapter provides a conclusion to a section that addresses a complex subject of the development of preaching in Russian Baptist communities. I have reviewed

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[59] *Istoriia Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR*, Chapter 7.

[60] "The Great Purge" (also known as "the Great Terror") is a term that refers to a wave of political repression in the Soviet Union that occurred between 1936 and 1938. This time is known for the mass arrests, imprisonments, and murders of the members of the Communistic Party, the Red Army, and every other social group in the country. I have referred to this era in section 3.4 Trials and Tribulations. For further reading see Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London, Allen Lane, 2007), Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990).

[61] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 85.

[62] Ibid., pp 179-180.

three distinct periods in Russian Baptist history – the formative years, the period of fast growth and maturity, and a much longer era of trials and tribulations. At all these stages, different external factors made the church adjust its theology and practices to the changing cultural and political environment.

At the early formative stages, the preaching of baptistic communities was characterised by heavy emphasis on moral living and projection of biblical narrative into the life of communities and individual Christians, as well as overt criticism of the Orthodox Church. This was important as communities were learning to use the Bible as the main source for their faith and practice. The next era, the period of freedom and fast growth, brought forward the need to bring coherence into the teaching of local churches. The need was addressed through extensive publishing activities of Baptists and Evangelical Christians. Spiritual articles, sermons, theological materials – all of these were also used in preaching. Theological and ministerial training was of prime importance, and was rapidly developing despite various barriers set by the authorities.

Spiritual formation and personal piety came to the forefront again during the time of persecution. The church lost all its educational institutions, and suffered a great loss of pastors and preachers. In such difficult times, those people who were able to train during the period of freedom played an extremely important role in churches. *BV* became the main source of theological and educational materials for the congregation across the Soviet Union. It featured a number of publications on preaching. I have shown that most of these articles presented biblical interpretation and more specifically ministry of proclamation as an impossibility without due spiritual preparation. Although the editors of the journal also touched upon some practical aspects of sermon preparation and delivery, nonetheless it can be said that the journal played an important role in making preaching a practice where preacher's spirituality was given far more weight than any other aspect of this ministry. In churches, such views led to a situation when being a preacher at first meant being an exemplary Christian, who spends sufficient amount of time with God and the Bible. However, gradually preachers were lifted to a special place of honour. The pulpit by itself became a sign of God's special calling and anointing.

This brings me to the last, most recent period in the development of the Baptist church in Russia. In the next chapter, I am going to address the current situation in Baptist churches in Russia and prevalent views of preaching.

CHAPTER 5. Preaching in contemporary Russian Baptist churches.

Introduction

The preacher's spirituality, the authority of the pulpit, and the listeners' attitude to proclamation in Russian Baptist churches – these are the main subjects of Chapter 5. At this stage of my research, it would be helpful to take a detour from the historical overview of the development of preaching in Russian Baptist communities, and to focus on another important question – how is preaching understood today? What do listeners of sermons and ministers of the Word say about preaching? I will introduce this subject by first mapping a context where preaching happens, offering a short overview of a place of worship and its significance.[1] Then I will turn to a worship service, its pattern, and participants. This will bring me to preaching as a central element of Christian worship in Russian Baptist communities, at the same time highlighting the need to view the ministry of proclamation in Russian Baptist churches as a more complex phenomenon than a public speech pronounced from the pulpit with a particular purpose.

I will argue that preaching plays a far greater role in churches today than that of mere educational or inspirational speech. Preaching is as much about teaching the Bible as about authority, which "the ministry of the Word" gives to its practitioners. As questions of power and authority are never taken into consideration when homiletics is taught in churches or Bible schools, this lack of understanding leads to tensions and conflicts between churches and educational institutions. Therefore, understanding preaching as an activity that belongs only to spheres of spirituality and rhetoric is reductionist, since such views cannot account for the various positive and negative dynamics in churches that preaching is responsible for. Henceforth for preachers the

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[1] I offer only a brief insight into the vast subject of Russian Baptist worship. Such a limited overview is intentional, due to the focus of my research, which is preaching. For more in-depth analysis of worship in Russian Baptist churches, see Leonid Mikhovich, "Traditional Russian-speaking Baptist Worship in Orthodox Context," in *Theological Reflections,* Vol. 13 (2013), pp. 24-37; Irina Timchenko, "Muzikalnaia Osnova Bogosluzheniia Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov" ["Music Foundations the Worship of Evangelical Christians – Baptists"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 1 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1996), pp 61-73; A. P. Kosinko, "Bibleiskoie Ponimaniie Bogosluzheniia v Dukhe i Istine" ["Biblical understanding of Worship service in Spirit and in Truth"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 9 (Moscow, MTSECB, 2003) pp 5-14.

question of good and bad preaching should mean far more than a matter of "being heard" by the audience.

Whilst this claim is based on my previous exploration of the historical, theological and cultural contexts in which Russian baptistic have developed, as well as the analysis of the development of the practice of proclamation and the contemporary state in Russian Baptist churches, I will illustrate it with the responses from the surveys collected in several Baptist churches from the Voronezh area, Russia, which would provide a meaningful conclusion to the Chapter and the whole section on the development of Russian Baptist preaching.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I will employ the concept of a "powerful practice" developed by James McClendon,[2] arguing that preaching should be understood as a powerful practice, which would enable churches and seminaries to address preaching's constructive as well as destructive potential.

5.1 The context of worship

The house of prayer

The place of worship plays an important part in Russian Baptist communities. Traditionally a church building is called "the House of Prayer" and is considered holy ground. People treat the place of worship with great reverence. No jokes, laughter or profane talk is allowed. Anything that is not directly related to worship can be considered profane. It is not uncommon for people on their way to the church to stop thinking about "earthly" or "secular" things, instead entering a prayerful, reverent mood. People, particularly the older generation of believers, are very careful with choosing their clothes when they go to church, since it is important to be dressed as "it is appropriate for the saints."[3] It is not uncommon before the beginning of a service for an older member of a church to enter the pulpit and start reading from the Scripture or from the *Bratskii Vestnik*, to prepare people for a worship event.[4]

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[2] McClendon, *Ethics,* p 179

[3] A reference to Titus 2:3 and 1 Timothy 2:9.

[4] Such reverent attitude is, however, gradually disappearing, particularly when younger generations of Christians are observed.

The pulpit holds central place in the majority of the church buildings. Those congregations who have built their Houses of Prayer during the last 15-20 years may have a shape of a concert hall or a gothic cathedral, with pews always facing the choir and the pulpit. Often, the pulpit is either at the centre or the side of the stage. Many congregations have converted regular homes into places of worship. Hence, they were unable to structure the space according to their wishes. Nonetheless, they still tried to arrange pews or chairs in such a way to ensure that people could see the preacher (not necessarily one another).[5]

Worship pattern

Russian Baptists take pride in having a Bible-based worship event. This does not mean that their service follows certain patterns extracted from biblical text.[6] Rather, it is an attempt to be different from the Russian Orthodox Church, which follows strict liturgies. The absence of rigid liturgy, open spontaneous prayer and extemporaneous preaching 'with the anointing of the Holy Spirit' were those characteristics of Baptists and Evangelical Christians that attracted many people at the early stage of the baptistic movement in Russia. However, despite this positive experience in history and often repeated claims that Baptists do not have traditions, Baptist worship in Russia

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[5] In conversations with a number of pastors, whose churches went through the building process, I could identify three issues which normally influence the church as it develops their building. These are financial abilities of the congregation, its size, and priorities in ministry. The last aspect does point to a practical manifestation of a theological stance of a church. Whether there is a lot of space for a Sunday school for children or extended cooking facilities, etc., indicates the priorities and therefore the theology of a particular community of believers.

However, there is little or no evidence that any Russian Baptist church has engaged in a specific theological reflection in the process of creating a place of worship. For more on how theology is reflected in architecture see Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004).

[6] Although, several references to biblical text are used to show that a Russian Baptist service consists of the same elements as the meetings of the first-century church. "Simplicity" is considered to be an indication of "the true spirit" of worshipping God (e.g. V. Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…," p 44). For an analysis of the origin of Christian worship service see Valerii Alikin, "Istoki Khristianskikh Sobranii: Ellinisticheskii Banket ili Iudeiskaia Sinagoga" ["The Roots of Christian Gatherings: Hellenistic Banquet or Jewish Synagogue"], in *Theological Reflections,* Special edition: Church Worship: Past and Future (2011).

may turn out to be as rigid as an Orthodox liturgy. The order of service does not differ much in various places around Russia. Moreover, as I shall demonstrate below, the pattern of worship has not significantly changed over the past hundred years.[7]

It might be possible to distinguish several types or patterns of corporate worship services among Russian Baptists: regular service, prayer service, communion service, evangelistic service, and a service that includes some special event like Baptism, ordination, wedding or prayer over children.[8] However, the differences between these services are rather small. For example, a prayer service[9] is almost identical to a regular worship service. The main difference is in sermons particularly directed on the importance of prayer, and motivating Christians to pray for a certain cause. Music also aims at creating reflective and meditative or "prayerful" atmosphere. Time-slots for extemporaneous prayers of the worshippers are normally extended, allowing anyone in the congregation to pray out loud.

Since the differences between various types of services are mainly in selection of hymns, the focus of sermons, and, sometimes, the number of sermons (if a service is built around a wedding or an ordination, the major event may substitute one or even two sermons), focusing on a regular worship service would be the most helpful, as it presents a core pattern around which certain changes are occasionally introduced.

The traditional pattern of worship service would be as follows:

1. The service begins with an opening prayer (in case of a major holiday like Easter or Christmas the opening words could be holiday greetings, which includes letters from the Baptist Union leaders, etc.).
2. The opening prayer is followed by a congregational hymn.
3. Depending on a size of a congregation and the development of their music ministry, there might be a choir piece (or an orchestra). Irina Timchenko, a music director from the First Baptist church in Moscow, wrote that the type or a theme

[7] For a description of a Stundist worship service at the end of the 19th century, see Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism,* p 251.

[8] Timchenko, "Muzikalnaia Osnova Bogosluzheniia…," p 70.

[9] A "prayer service" is different from a "prayer meeting," which might be a small group gathering when a few passages from the Bible are read and most of the time is spent in meditative prayer.

of the service influences the choice of this first hymn, which can either be a hymn-prayer (for a regular service) or a triumphant choral.[10]

4. The first sermon comes next. Normally this is a shorter sermon (between 10 and 20 min.) delivered either by a guest or a young preacher who is only beginning his pulpit ministry. In many churches, this sermon is called "a call to prayer." It is always followed by extemporaneous prayers from members of the congregation, and the time of prayer is concluded by the preacher.
5. The prayer is followed by a choir piece, congregational hymn and often by several smaller "performances," such as solo singing, chamber choir or orchestral piece, a short testimony or a poem.
6. As a rule, the second sermon is preached by an experienced preacher (or a second pastor). Usually it is a general exhortation on Christian living.
7. The sermon is followed by an interlude that consists of choir, congregational or solo singing. The collection can be done at this point.
8. The final sermon is traditionally preached either by a pastor of the church or another respected minister. Often this preacher tries to summarize other sermons that were preached during the service. This is also the time used to "correct mistakes" of the previous speakers. Obviously, the degree of their correctness is defined solely by that last preacher.[11] As a rule the final sermon is concluded by a call to repentance.[12]

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[10] Timchenko, "Muzikalnaia Osnova Bogosluzheniia…," p 71.

[11] In a personal interview about his preaching ministry, a young pastor from a small congregation in the Voronezh area, mentioned that preaching the last sermon in every service was the main principle of his preaching ministry. Such an approach allowed him to ensure that people leave the church with the 'correct biblical theology.' (Personal interview with pastor A (Voronezh, 25.07.2014), available through the author). Ironically, this pastor never received any theological training himself, and most of his preaching was directed at "fighting sin and temptation." It was the pastor and the deacons who decided what was to be labelled as "sinful" – one of their youth leaders was banned from participation in ministry, because he worked as a waiter at a restaurant. In this case, preaching the last sermon was understood to be a tool, a powerful instrument of control, available to the pastor, and not anyone else.

[12] An important notice should be made regarding this "invitation to come forward," practiced in Russian churches. People are invited to come to the pulpit and repent. Repentance is understood as asking God for forgiveness, confessing Jesus as Saviour and a promise to follow Christ from that moment onwards. This repentance is viewed as an important step to becoming a follower of Christ.

9. The choir often sings a hymn that calls people to repentance.[13]
10. At the end of the service the pastor (and a few other people) may bring announcements; greetings are passed to the church from other places. Finally, a short benediction is said, traditionally "the Grace" from 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Participants

The pattern of a worship service presented above suggests that there are many people who actively participate in worship in various ways, and who are not passive listeners. Various kinds of music ministries, testimonies, poems, and of course multiple acts of preaching require many members to be involved. Moreover, when the number of weekly services, which is normally three or four (mid-week service, Saturday evening service and two Sunday services) are added to the picture, it becomes obvious that churches that follow this pattern, have to have many people taking an active part (and initiative) in leading worship services.

However, it is important to point out that the Russian Baptist traditional worship patterns do not only *require* many participants, but have *developed* this way because of the very strong communal nature of the Russian Baptist church.[14] It is significant that these churches use the same word when speaking both about a congregation and its corporate worship service. The word is "sobranie," which means "gathering." Such an understanding as "gathering of the saints" resulted in the lack of clear structure of the worship service. For example, in most cases it is possible for individual worshippers to approach a pastor or a music director with a request to contribute or share with the congregation a song, a poem, a testimony – anything "that would bless" or "would be edifying for a church" *even after the service has already started.*[15] In his research on Russian Baptist hermeneutical practices A. Popov notices,

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[13] E.g. "Neuzheli Uidesh Ty Ne Priniav Khrista, Chtob Dalshe Vo Mrake Bluzhdat…'" ["Will you leave without accepting Christ, to go back wandering in the darkness].

[14] Evgenii Goncharenko, "The National Roots and Ingenuity of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in Russia," in Tony Cupit, ed., *Baptists in Worship* (Berlin, BWA, 1998), p 97.

[15] Church members have mixed feelings on this openness to interruptions and flexibility of the order of service. Some appreciate it and use their "right" to contribute. Others feel that such lack of order is harmful. I will address this further in my analysis of the surveys collected in churches.

> The church was not primarily considered as having a task to perform. Rather it was a family which existed for its own sake. The church needed no other goal than the cultivation of the communal life of believers. Certainly nobody would deny that spreading the Gospel was the mission of the church, but that was not of primary significance. Fostering believers in their faith was a major reason for the existence of a local church. This took place primarily through preaching, but also in controlling the behaviour of church members and determining punishment for sins.[16]

Having pointed to the important role of the community in general, let us have a closer look at who is and can be involved. Music ministry, which includes singing in a choir, playing instruments, singing solo, etc., is rather simple – anyone can be involved. The only requirement is that a person is neither on church discipline[17] (if a church member) nor having a particularly sinful way of life (for non-members), since everyone who participates in worship has to provide a positive example for other believers. This role of being an example occasionally raises an issue of whether non-members (or even non-believers) can be involved in music ministry at all. However, in most cases, baptism and church membership are not viewed as a necessary prerequisite for joining a choir or

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[16] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 259.

[17] In this work I am following the following definition of church discipline: It is a practice of the community of believers based on Matthew 18:15-18 (key text), Luke 17:3, John 20:22-23, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2:5-9, Galatians 6:1, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14, 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Titus 3:10 and a few others. Church discipline has several aims: 1) helping fellow-Christians in their following Christ; 2) restoration of the fallen brother/sister back into the community; 3) resolving conflicting situations among the members. (Timofey Cheprasov, "Church Discipline," in John H. Y. Briggs, general editor, *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Kenyes, Paternoster, 2009), pp 93-94).

In Russian Baptist churches, "being on church discipline" means that the person is not allowed to participate in the Eucharist and business meetings of church members until he/she repents of the committed sin and restores broken relationships with the church. Unfortunately, the practice is often used as punitive, aiming at the elimination of sinful behaviour (this includes various sins mentioned in the Bible, as well as any other type of behaviour that is considered sinful by a particular community (it can go as far as the type of clothing that a person wears or the place where he/she works), rather than restorative, focusing at reaching out and healing person's broken relationships with God and the church.

a praise band. Poetry and testimonies are also open to everyone, both men and women, both baptised members and those who have only begun coming to a church.[18]

The ministers of the Word and the problem of authority

Unlike music ministry, to be a preacher one has to meet two conditions. Firstly, a potential preacher has to be a man.[19] Secondly, he has to be a baptised member of a Baptist church in good standing (not on church discipline). Often, these are the only conditions for a person to be approached and offered an opportunity to preach. Moreover, to be a preacher does not require theological/homiletical training. Preaching is seen not as a professional activity that involves training and preparation, but rather as a responsibility of every Christian man. Finally, it is worth noting that there is no special worship leader. Traditionally, this is a role of a pastor (or a senior preacher – the one who

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[18] Kargel's views on the relationships between the believer and the Holy Spirit might be helpful to gaining an understanding of the expectations of the church in relation to people involved in ministry. Kargel speaks about the role of the Holy Spirit in giving the believers 'the power from on high,' which is required for the life of the disciples, enabling them to be Christ-like. Any obvious sinful acts, like lack of love or compassion, cruelty or desire to be praised – are clear indications of the person not living with the Holy Spirit. ("V Kakom Ti Otnoshenii k Dukhu Sviatomu" ["What is Your Relationship to the Holy Spirit"], *Sobraniie Sochinenii [The Collection of Works]* (St. Petersburg, Biblia Dlya Vsekh, 1997) p 124.) Kargel insists that being filled by the Holy Spirit is a necessary requirement for believers, since it produces a desire to serve others, sharing with them everything that was given by God (*V Kakom Ti Otnoshenii,* p 133).

[19] In the previous chapter I have already touched upon the subject of women in preaching ministry. Although historically in Russian Baptist churches and in churches of Evangelical Christians, the pulpit was open to women (which is clearly stated in the *BV* in several instances, e.g. Vol. 3, 1945 (pp 48-49); Vol. 1, 1948 (p 7)), the majority of contemporary Baptist churches have drastically changed their attitude to women in preaching and in pastoral ministry – this is considered sinful and unbiblical. Although it is difficult to trace the roots of such changes (which might be a good subject for another piece of research), through the surveys collected from various churches I noticed that the majority of the older generation of preachers and pastors (none of whom received any theological training) responded positively to a question whether women should be preaching in Baptist churches (nevertheless, it has to be noted that female preachers has never been common in Russian baptistic communities). Most of the categorically negative responses were received from pastors and preachers less than 40 years of age, mostly with at least a Bachelor degree in theology. This raises a question on how the contents of the educational programmes that developed in the post-Soviet countries influenced the contemporary theological convictions and practices of the Baptist churches. However, this is a subject for another research.

is responsible for a final sermon). Leading a service is limited to announcing the next item on a programme, praying for the needs of the congregation and saying a final prayer.

The discussion about participants and leaders of worship service must mention A. Popov's point about the existence of 'a special class of believers who had the title of "ministers" (*sluzhiteli*[20]).' These people are not pastors, and few of them are paid by a church, although pastors and deacons are a part of this group. The majority of *sluzhiteli* are involved in various ministries of local churches, yet their main feature was their exemplary spiritual life and deep knowledge of the Bible. A. Popov notices,

> [T]hese ministers were considered as a spiritual elite, consisting of a few chosen ones in the congregation. The status of *sluzhiteli* had to be won by personal qualities and recognition by church leaders. Although the title of "minister" was not a legal term in the Statutes of the AUCECB it can be found in many official documents.[21]

The concept of *sluzhiteli,* most of whom are involved in *the ministry of the Word*, brings up a notion of authority and its connection to preaching.

Yuri Sipko, who served as a president of Russian Baptist Union from 2002 until 2010, addresses the problems of ministerial authority in his article "Zhit' po Biblii ili po "pon'iatiiam"?" ["To Live According to the Bible or According to 'unwritten laws'?"]. Although he maintains a positive image of *sluzhiteli*, saying that they are 'entrusted with the building up of the saints,' nonetheless, he indicates that various abuses ("spiritual accidents") do happen. Answering the question 'Why 'unwritten laws of "the brothers"'[22] are sometimes more important than the Holy Scripture in Baptist churches?' Sipko points out several important elements of the problem. First is the

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[20] The word "sluzhitel" derives its meaning from the verb "to serve." However, in Baptist churches, this concept has a much more complex connotation, with many shades and facets of meaning, making it difficult to explain to the "outsiders" of the Russian Baptist sub-culture. This difficulty points to an important issue of "language barrier," which is one of the negative consequences of the enforced separation of the church from social life during communistic oppression. (Pavlyuk, "Destructivnoie Nasiediie Sovetskogo Proshlogo," p 41).

[21] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…", pp 259-260.

[22] "*Brothers"* is another term used in Russian Baptist communities in the same meaning as the term "*sluzhiteli*."

lack of critical engagement with the Bible, both among the preachers and the listeners. He argues that once a church has formed its theological position on various biblical and moral principles, it became intolerant to anyone questioning these views. The second contributing factor is the threatening and oppressive environment in which Baptist churches existed and developed (during the Soviet era), which resulted in the withdrawal of Christian communities from the Soviet society, and subsequently developed sense of mistrust or even hostility to the outsiders.

Finally, Sipko refers to a culturally accepted authoritarian form of leadership among Russian Baptists, 'Tsarist style in the state [leadership], in society, in churches, results in formation of leaders' holy immunity. The leader does not err!' According to Sipko, such style of leadership is both imposed "from above," being taught by church leaders, and supported "from below," with lay people treating pastors as "God's anointed servants." All of it brings about a serious problem: for a church leader to accept that he might be mistaken, means 'to accept his inadequacy and to lose face.' Inevitably, these pastors/preachers rarely hesitate using such arguments in their teaching and preaching as 'obedience is better than sacrifice,' 'this is accepted practice in the brotherhood,' 'you simply need to listen.' People who dare to disagree or criticise the practices or theology of such leaders are called 'heretics', or labelled as 'traitors'. Sipko concludes that such pastors have usurped the right of the whole Church to read, understand, and interpret biblical truth.[23]

The notion of the preacher's authority is extensively developed by David M. Brown in *Transformational Preaching: Theory and Practice.* Adapting Max Weber's concept of authority having 'charismatic,' 'rational,' and 'traditional' causes,[24] Brown presents three sources of preacher's authority. First is 'anointed authority,' which comes 'from outside the institution and resides in the character of the individual.' This is where the preacher may speak about the divine calling for their ministry. Second is 'attributed authority,' which is 'attributed or granted, by the institution,' for instance,

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[23] Yuri K. Sipko, "Zhit' po Biblii ili po "pon'iatiiam"?" ["To Live According to the Bible or According to 'unwritten laws'?"], accessed on 17.02.2015 from http://ysipko.ru/zhit-po-biblii-ili-po-ponyatiyam.

[24] Max *Weber*, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations* (A.M. Henderson & T. Parsons, Trans.; Glencoe, IL, The Free Press, 1947), pp 324-423.

a local church or a denomination appoints someone for a particular ministry. The third type of authority is what Brown calls 'assumed,' which is 'authority that emerges from within the preaching event itself. It resides fully in the person who is fulfilling the role, but only while in that role.'[25]

Brown emphasises that for preaching to be persuasive and motivating, preachers have to be recognised by their listeners as those having authority to speak, particularly if preaching is understood as a prophetic ministry. Nonetheless, he points out a number of potential dangers in dealing with the issue of authority in preaching. A preacher's personal and spiritual integrity becomes extremely important, as 'strong Christian character' serves as a guarantee against a threat of preaching being used as a tool to manipulate the listeners and gain control over them. In this sense, the prominence given to preachers' ethics and spirituality in Russian Baptist communities appears as a much needed response. On the other hand, together with preachers' integrity, Brown highlights another vital element of a healthy understanding of authority – educated listeners, who provide the necessary accountability factor for the people in the pulpit. Brown says,

> Clearly, the preacher is known by his or her proclamation. The true disciple, of course has fruit that can be seen in his or her lifestyle and language, and this is true for the person who preaches. But when we talk about the act of preaching, there is only one real fruit, and that is the proclamation. Given no other evidence, we should be able to tell by the rhetoric of the preacher whether he or she is "legitimate." Here, then, is a call for educated listeners. Preachers who keep their listeners ignorant may well be hiding their own fear that they are not really preaching biblically.[26]

Now, this second element of educated listeners is often missing from the equation in Russian Baptist communities, leaving both the "prophets" and their listeners vulnerable and unprotected from the potential abuses of power. Moreover, instead of learning to read the biblical story afresh, without the strangling lenses of the tradition, allowing and enabling regular church goers to become the practitioners, the

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[25] Brown, *Transformational Preaching,* pp 239-247.

[26] Ibid., p 243.

interpreters of the Word, the church establishment (sluzhiteli) often plays a negative role, suppressing sincere questions, emphasising the value of traditions (even those without any biblical foundations, like prohibition for women to preach) at any cost. This specific attitude to leadership in Russian culture, which views church leaders as people anointed by God, and which allows a lot of space for mystical direct involvement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers through participation in a holy event of worship and listening to the Word,[27] further contributes to the formation of what Sipko calls 'ministerial holy immunity.'[28]

Nikolai A. Kornilov, a professor of history at MTSECB, makes an important observation about the nature of biblical authority in churches. He argues that although the church teaches that people have to believe the Bible, in reality, people are taught a set of convictions defined by the leaders of this church, Union or denomination. This is very similar to the teaching of the Orthodox Church – 'believe everything that the Church is teaching you.'[29] The lack of engagement of ordinary members in in-depth reading and understanding of the biblical message and in its application to the lives of the readers, and substituting it with some mysterious "teaching of the church" poses serious problems for witness of such congregations. Kornilov wrote,

> When the Bible is given in an ideological wrapping, as a solution to all griefs and problems, it becomes very dangerous. This is because if it does not work as such solution, it is be instantly rejected. Or this would lead to fanaticism. Apart from this, any ideology quickly loses appeal in Russia. This includes biblical ideology. Without real changes in people's lives, no ideology, no teaching would be accepted. If a church is only teaching the Bible, and not helping people to deal with their everyday problems and griefs, such congregation, such church becomes redundant for people. That is why we, Christians, are the first reason for the destruction of biblical authority. First, we do not know it [the Bible]. We do not study it. We only quote it, use it to

[27] See discussion on Theosis and Sobornost in Chapter 2.

[28] Sipko, "Zhit' po Biblii ili po "pon'iatiiam"?"

[29] Nicolai A. Kornilov, "K Voprosu ob Avtoritete v Khristianskoi Zhizni" ["To the Question of Authority in Christian Life"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 2 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1997), pp 14-15.

> cover up our opinions and preferences… This is a source of the second problem: the lack of understanding [of the Bible] forces us to preach what is on the surface, what we are used to. But we do not speak from the Bible, we do not answer people's needs. That is why our preaching is empty, passing by people's lives.[30]

Although I, by no means, claim or assume that all or even the majority of preachers in Russian Baptist churches can find themselves in the above mentioned article of Yuri Sipko, the point he is making has to be taken seriously. Whilst the typology of the source of preaching authority suggested by Brown helps to get a better understanding of the multifaceted concept of authority and power in churches, a significant point should not be omitted – the call for *educated listeners, able to evaluate the message proclaimed from the pulpit and call the preacher to accountability*. This latter element is often left out from the Russian Baptist ecclesial scene, thus leaving churches without an important tool of protection against various abuses of power. In order to further explore the role of preaching and preachers and Russian Baptist communities, my next step will turn to the listeners, and evaluate their perception of the ministry of the Word.

5.2 Contemporary understanding of preaching

The first part of this chapter seeks to answer the question of what is Russian preaching, where it happens, who are the practitioners, and addresses a number of serious issues that are rooted in authority that preachers receive through their ministry. Now I would like to turn to the question of how preaching is perceived in contemporary Russian Baptist churches. In order to answer this question, I have collected 100 surveys from four Baptist churches in the Voronezh region. Aiming to have a variety of congregations included in my study, I have approached the First Baptist Church of Voronezh, which is a congregation that follows traditional patterns of worship and preaching with approximately 450 members located in a centre of a large city. The second church is a smaller community with approximately 130 regular worshippers, founded in 1997 in the village of Somovo, a suburb of Voronezh. The third church (Blagodat [Grace]) is also a fairly small (100-120 members) community,

[30] Ibid., p 34.

which was started 25 years ago, with a large proportion of young adults attending the services (approx. 65%). The church is located in the city of Voronezh. Finally, the fourth church ("Severnaia Tserkov") was a rather recent church plant – a church that was started approximately 10 years ago by a small group of members from the First Baptist Church of Voronezh. This community also has a high proportion of young people, although it follows a very traditional style of worship and preaching (multiple sermons in every worship service). Current membership of the church is just over 90 people.

The churches mentioned above were chosen in order to see whether the location, the age of the congregation, and patterns of service that are followed affect the way people understand preaching and what they expect it to be. Initially, working with these communities was supposed to be the first step towards conducting similar surveys in churches across the Russian Federation. It might be important to mention that these surveys were the very first step in this whole project on preaching in Russian Baptist communities. Initially, I have approached the subject of "formative preaching" in a similar way to many educators, both Russian and Anglo-American, who attempted to teach preaching in Russia. I was interested in such questions as how people listen to sermons. What do they remember (if anything) after the preaching event? Which themes can be called relevant? What rhetorical devices are appropriate in the pulpit in a given cultural setting? The survey required nearly two hours to complete, with respondents needing to write their own answers.[31]

However, the picture built out of the responses that I received from the churches was very complex, pointing to various important and sometimes unexpected issues. There were a number of unforeseen topics that came to the forefront, which eventually gave my whole research a different direction – from a study on homiletics towards a realization that "the ministry of the Word" should be approached differently, and seen within the context of Russian historical and theological nests. Further research on the subject (Chapters 1-4) has revealed that views and understanding of preaching that can be observed in the churches I have surveyed, is a natural outcome of how preaching in Russia has been developing. Thus I decided to limit my survey to one region – Voronezh, which will be used as a case study that, based on the findings of the preceding chapters,

[31] For the questionnaire used see Appendix 1.

can be seen as largely representative of Russian Baptists. Thus for this particular study and research question it is my contention that more surveys were not needed.

Furthermore, it is important to make it clear that I am not attempting to do quantitative research, although I have aimed at having respondents from various age groups, educational background, and Christian experience. Neither should the use of "percentages" of people who responded in various ways be an indication of my attempt to do statistical analysis of the views of preaching prevalent in Russian Baptist communities. The use of the *impressions and opinions* of the respondents from Voronezh area was *instrumental in directing my studies towards historical and theological analysis* of how preaching evolved in Russian baptistic churches. At this stage, the summary of the results of the surveys serves, first of all, as *an illustration* that is based on previous historical and theological study. I hope that this work will stimulate further research of the field of Russian baptistic preaching, including extensive quantitative and qualitative research.

I have received 25 surveys from every congregation (100 in total). These included 8-10 preachers (all male); and 15-17 non-preachers, men and women of different age groups. It must be noted that the received responses did not seem to depend on the age or gender of the respondents,[32] which serves as another confirmation of my previous claim that the existing understanding and form of preaching in Russian Baptist churches has deep cultural, theological and historical roots.

Let me try to summarize the findings of the survey in a form of an expanded definition of what preaching is understood to be:

1. Preaching is a vehicle which brings the written Word of God (the Bible) into the lives of the listeners. This happens when the Holy Spirit speaks through preachers.

An important issue to point out is that the border between the Written Word of God and the proclaimed Word is rather blurred. Preaching viewed as a Word of God includes both – the Bible is explained, but also that God Himself speaks through the preacher.

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[32] Due to the limitations and a focus of my research I did not attempt to perform an in-depth analysis of the convictions of different age groups in local churches. This might be an important subject for further studies of Baptist churches in Russia.

2. The results of sermons are up to God because it is He who works in acts of proclamation.

Preachers believe that they should not have clearly defined aims, which they would like to achieve through their preaching when entering the pulpit. The only result that preaching must hope to achieve (nearly 60% of the respondents mentioned that) is conversion, which is also the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Mikhail Grytsyk, a pastor of a Slavic Baptist church in Prague (Czech Republic), who comes from a traditional Russian-Ukrainian Baptist background, shared a personal story during our discussion about the need for preachers to use understandable language in preaching. He said, 'I was coming to a church for two years, not understanding a thing. However, God's Spirit was at work within me. And eventually I was changed, accepting Jesus as my Saviour.'[33] Hence, it is believed that all the preacher should do is to allow the Holy Spirit to work (which first of all is achieved through personal spiritual life, rather than preparation for the event of proclamation). The only other 'worthy aim' of preachers is 'to have hope that people will learn to rely on the Word of God, and will be transformed.'[34]

3. There is no bad preaching. It simply cannot exist.

For the majority of the respondents a sermon is a mystery. This idea features in one way or another in nearly 90% of all the surveys. True preaching starts "on the knees" (which means "in prayer"), as some pastors like to remind us, and is fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. Such understanding explains why those people who have belonged to a church for a long period of time are afraid to be critical about preaching.[35] Some of them have "corrected" my questions in a survey: "Are there bad sermons?" and "How often do you hear bad sermons in your church?" They wrote phrases such as, 'Preaching is a result of God's work, it cannot be bad.' Another characteristic feature of such "fear of criticism"

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[33] The discussion took place at a seminar on preaching, which I organised for the preachers and potential preachers from their church, Vinogradnaia Loza [The Vine]. The seminar took place at IBTS, Prague, 15.05.2006.

[34] This quotation is taken from one of the surveys, collected in the First Baptist Church of Voronezh.

[35] This claim, however, is based on my personal experiences of meeting various people in a number of Russian Baptist churches, hence requires further testing.

can be summed up in a sentence that both preachers preach and listeners affirm: 'If you do not find the sermon edifying, something is wrong with your spiritual condition.'

Let me expand this point a little further. The questions related to bad preaching were answered by "the listeners" in a following way:

- approximately 60% of the non-preachers (37 people) firmly stated that preaching cannot be bad. Only 8 people in this group were under 50 years of age. Thus, the majority of those who view preaching as the supernatural activity of God, which therefore cannot be criticised, are people over 50 years of age, who have been members in Baptist churches for over 2 years. They see their spiritual immaturity or the "hardness of their hearts" as main reasons for some sermons "not touching them."
- Approximately 20% of the "listeners" (12 people) say that there are too many bad sermons. They define bad sermons as speeches that lack structure and meaning, which is a result of preachers having insufficient education and preparation for the act of proclamation. However, these people also believe that 'God can use even bad preaching to change the hearts of the listeners.'
- Finally, the last 20% of the responded non-preachers (13 people) believe that although there are some bad sermons, this is often caused by preachers not investing enough time in prayer and preparation, since preaching by itself cannot be bad, being in its essence the work of the Holy Spirit. (This last point is a contradiction in itself, yet such conflicting views are not unusual when people express their views about church and faith.)[36]

Among the people involved in preaching the attitude to "bad sermons" is slightly different.

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[36] It might be helpful to refer to the research of Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers, who argue that the main difference between Western and Eastern thinking is that the latter is not preoccupied with building logically coherent structures or systems. Instead various narratives, facts or convictions are allowed to be independent, thus allowing peaceful coexistence of seemingly conflicting stories/beliefs. (Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K Mayers, *Ministering Cross Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 2003), p 52.) Cf. Parush R. Parushev, "East and West: A Theological Conversation," *Journal of European Baptist Studies,* Vol. I, Issue 1 (September 2000), pp 31-44

- Approximately 37% of the respondents (14 preachers) believe that preaching is always good, being solely a result of God's work.
- 25% (10) – indicated that there are many bad sermons.
- Around 38% (16 preachers) expressed their conviction that if a preacher does not invest enough time in preparation he should not expect that a sermon would be successful (which means, will "touch people's hearts").

The majority of the respondents who held a very high view of preaching are generally preachers over 50 years old. They believe that preaching cannot be bad, because it is the Word of God. Preparation for preaching is first of all a spiritual exercise for preachers' hearts and minds, which involves prayer and a good knowledge of the Bible. Younger preachers (20-35 years old) generally express dissatisfaction with the quality of preaching in churches, arguing that preachers do not prepare enough. Their concept of preparation differs from viewing it as a purely spiritual exercise. Rather, they emphasise an in-depth understanding of biblical text (achieved through the use of various commentaries), being in favour of expository preaching popularised by John McArthur.[37]

Let me add a bit more complexity to this already intricate issue. As I wrote earlier, effectively 80% of non-preaching respondents (50 people) and 70% of preachers (30 people) believe that preaching cannot be bad (with some allowance for the poor spiritual preparation/condition of the preachers). Nonetheless, approximately 75% of all the respondents (75 people) answered negatively to the question of whether they agree/trust everything they hear from the pulpit. Most people (including those respondents who maintained a very positive view of preaching ministry) were also able to identity various issues they did not like about preaching in their churches – whether they considered sermons to be too long or lacking structure or clarity, or being irrelevant for their needs.

Leonid Mikhovich in his forthcoming dissertation on public worship in Belarus addresses the question of poor preaching. He argues that there are various reasons for the ministry of the Word to attract much criticism and the dissatisfaction of church

[37] Chapter 9 will address questions of contemporary preaching education in several theological educational institutions in Russia.

members. These are the poor preparation of the preachers, both spiritual and biblical, the lack of gifted preachers, and the inability of pastors to say "no" to willing brothers, who clearly have no calling to this ministry. All of this is possible due to the need to have large number of preachers because of the number of worship services in churches (3-4 per week) and sermons in a service (2-4). The lack of qualified preachers results in sermons having no practical application to the lives of the listeners, being superficial, lacking "spiritual depth," and, which is equally important, having no passion (when it comes to delivery). Often, preachers use extensive notes and even full manuscripts, thus turning sermons into lectures.

Nonetheless, the author points out that although the above mentioned weaknesses reduce the effect a sermon can produce, people believe that even "weak" sermons bring God's blessings, since God's power is revealed in weakness. Moreover, out of three or four sermons in a service, there is at least one, which is of good quality. Hymns and prayers continue to minister to people in addition to preaching. Finally, many people learnt not to expect too much of sermons – they listen to quality preaching on radio or television, but come to a public worship to meet their sisters and brothers, to be present in God's House and to listen to His words (in every sermon there is a lot of biblical material, which inspires people).[38]

At this stage, a brief conclusion might be necessary. Preaching is considered to be the main element of Baptist worship, the part which transmits God's words to the listeners. The "ministry of the Word" in the eyes of many listeners is first of all "the ministry of the Spirit," which has the power to transform people's lives and hearts. Preachers, therefore, are viewed as "anointed ministers," called by God to the building up of His church. As such, their ministry should never be critically examined or criticised. This strong conviction, of ordinary Christians not challenging those "anointed by God," is first of all cultivated by some pastors and preachers. A long standing emphasis on a person's spirituality as the key to biblical interpretation has further advanced the formation of preachers (the interpreters of the Word) as a separate caste, special people, Christian elite, superior to others in their closeness to God.

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[38] Leonid Mikhovich, "Compatibility of Theology and Practice of Traditional Public Worship in Baptist Churches in Belarus", forthcoming doctoral dissertation for the award of PhD degree (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam).

A second important contributing factor in pastors/preachers receiving special treatment is inherently present in the Russian Orthodox culture, where preaching is seen as the instrument of 'divine presence, rather than moralising discourse.'[39] The role of the listeners, therefore, is to come with their hearts prepared for a sacred event. The balance of heart or mind, emotions or reason is an important question when persuasive discourse is concerned. In the Russian Baptist context heart and emotions take priority. Believers are invited to come, humble themselves, repent of their wrongdoings, and allow God to work in their lives. For the majority of participants in worship, such qualities as humbleness and a repentant heart exclude "the spirit of criticism."

Speaking about the audience, it is important to notice the absence of "educated listeners" as Brown calls them. At the same time, it would be wrong to say that ordinary members in Russian churches are biblically illiterate. On the contrary, people generally know the Bible very well. They can easily quote various passages from the Scripture. However, their ability to go beyond literal understanding of biblical passages is rather limited. A. Popov wrote,

> The beliefs of the ECB concerning the Bible defined the methodology of Bible studies. The principles of simplicity and holiness implied that spiritual (not intellectual) development was the key to a correct understanding of sound biblical teaching. As a result, these evangelical believers treated education in general and Christian education in particular with great suspicion because, in their opinion, it was likely to be an attempt at forgery – an attempt to forge genuine spirituality. For them true spirituality could be reached only through personal holiness, which could be achieved through deeper fellowship with Christ.[40]

Hence, despite people's ability to freely quote Biblical text, it is still possible to speak about the absence of 'educated listeners, able to hold preachers accountable,' the point made by Kornilov.[41]

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[39] Jensen, *Envisioning the Word,* p 43.

[40] A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 110.

[41] Kornilov, "K Voprosu ob Avtoritete v Khristianskoi Zhizni," pp 14-15.

Due to various reasons mentioned earlier in this work, such as political oppression and somewhat forced emphasis on spirituality, the pulpit, from being a symbol of the baptistic movement in Russia (which started through preaching, simplistic retelling and application of the Biblical narrative into the lives of people), became a sign of special anointing and authority for the chosen few, consequently limiting the right and desire of ordinary members to read and interpret the Scripture. Individual theologies of the church leaders (pastors and to a lesser degree church councils) became a major formative factor in shaping all aspects of Baptist ecclesial life. Pastors turned into sole arbiters who accepted/rejected preachers and sermons as appropriate or heretical, edifying the church or disturbing and disrupting the congregation, as well as making decisions regarding worship practices, social ministries, and even matters of everyday life for their members. Therefore, the lack of accountability, the absence of the congregation that could reflect critically and theologically on the Word proclaimed or certain church practices (which gradually turn into traditions, unwritten laws, etc.) played a major role in the appearance of various abuses, ranging from "spiritual accidents" (as Sipko calls them) to "small incidents," like churches losing young people, and even to the general loss of denominational identity. Contemporary Baptists in Russia, as well as other post-Soviet countries, find it very hard to explain who they are and why they do what they do. The revivalist movement that aimed at reshaping all areas of Russian society has turned into a religious institution with rigid structures, practices and traditions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the contemporary understanding of preaching in Russian Baptist churches. I have briefly touched upon the context of worship service and space, and the people involved in leading worship and preaching. The years of communistic oppression and over-emphasis on the ministry of the Word being primarily a result of the preacher's involvement with the Holy Spirit, resulted in the pulpit turning into an office that attributes power and authority. Preachers (and especially church leaders) formed a separate class of "Christian elite" – they were seen as people especially close to God and filled by the Holy Spirit. Culturally bound understanding of leadership coupled by the emphasis on special "anointing" of pastors/preachers caused suppression of the need for the church's engagement in reflection and discussion of the Biblical text. Instead, uncritical acceptance of anything proclaimed from the pulpits was encouraged and taught.

This resulted in the absence of “educated listeners,” able to call preachers to accountability, thus leaving both churches and their leaders vulnerable to various abuses of power, as well as in Baptist churches gradually turning into rigid religious institutions with set traditions and practices.

In the next chapters I will argue that preaching must be seen as a powerful practice, producing both virtues and vices (not only through what is being proclaimed or left unsaid, but through the way preaching is exercised), in order to maintain its positive formative role in developing baptistic identity.

CHAPTER 6. The need for a vision: defining baptistic identity

Introduction

In my attempt to study the role of preaching in Russian Baptist communities, I have shown how proclamation, simplistic retelling of the biblical story played a major role in the formation of the first baptistic congregations, who were forced to leave the Orthodox Church because of their conviction that everyone needed to study the Bible, and apply it into their lives, being guided by the Holy Spirit. Through various stages in their development, these Christians maintained a very high view of the ministry of the Word, which they perceived as a direct work of God in their midst. Preachers' spirituality came to the forefront as the main prerequisite for a successful ministry of interpretation and proclamation of God's message. The years of persecution and oppression under communistic regime, when churches were forcefully separated from all the aspects of social life including education, resulted in distortions both in how churches perceived their role and place in the society (from seeing themselves as a transformative force in culture in the time of Prokhanov to an inward looking idea of spiritual survival) and in how leaders were perceived and treated. Preachers were seen as people with a special anointing from God, as chosen disciples called to be in God's presence to receive His message, which was to be given to other less spiritual Christians. Inevitably, such separation into classes, the re-appearance of "priests" and "lay members," brought numerous problems, affecting various aspects of the life of the Church, including relationships between members within the congregations, as well as the teaching and witness of the local churches.

Newly gained freedom after the collapse of the USSR and almost immediate spread of educational institutions that produced thousands of graduates in theology, revealed the discrepancy between the need of more educated Christians and trained pastors and preachers, which was proclaimed by the leadership of the Baptist Unions in Russia, and the reality, when churches were not willing to accept and use people with qualifications in theology. The pneumotological approach to ministry appropriated by churches, the space attributed to the role of the Holy Spirit effectively excluded the need for education, which was perceived as a threat to authentic spirituality.

The ministry of the Word was rather central to the church-seminary struggle. Churches saw preaching as paving the way for authentic Baptist spirituality (although no one knew what either spirituality or "baptist" meant, in practice, preaching was often turning into obscure reflections of various "brothers" with a call to repentance at the end), and opening the doors for the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, this perception of preaching as an act of proclamation, which allows the Holy Spirit to work (in a mysterious way) in the hearts and minds of the listeners during the event, does not account for potential abuses of power and lack of pastoral accountability that is common in Russian Baptist churches. Equally sterile were the various attempts of educational institutions, which had not contextualised their methods (effectively neglecting questions of Baptist identity), yet attempted to reform churches and preaching by teaching homiletics, thus reducing preaching to the areas of hermeneutics and rhetoric.[1]

Therefore, I have argued that instead of being perceived as an act, which possesses some spiritual or educational value, preaching has to be seen as a powerful practice. Churches and theological schools need to recognise its constructive and destructive potential in order to preserve and maintain baptistic identity, which would enable a more constructive relationship between the Church and the University, thus leading to the much needed transformation of the contemporary Russian Baptist movement.

This brings me to the important question of baptistic identity.[2] What are the characteristics of a church that can be called baptistic? What defines the borders of

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[1] Douglas P. Sharp says that the main purpose of a theological school is to form church leaders, 'personally and spiritually mature, well versed in sacred literature of our Christian tradition and enough qualified to lead pastoral, prophetic and evangelical ministry in Christian community.' Obviously, such a task required a clear understanding of the denominational Christian identity and character ("Kto Takiie Baptisty Segodnia? Razmishleniia o Vosstanovlenii Baptistskoi Identichnosti i Kharaktera: Bogoslovskoie Obrazovaniie kak Akt Protivostoianiia Gospodstvuyuschei Kulture" [Who are Baptists Today? Reflections on Rebuilding of Baptist Identity and Character: Theological Education as an Act of Resistance to Culture"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia*, Vol. 4 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1998), p 110).

[2] As I have stated earlier, when I speak about identity, I refer to something that makes a person or a community part of one culture (in this case, a baptistic culture), something that makes them distinct from others, that allows them to refer to themselves as one whole, something that sets the direction for their existence and defines their practices – the set of their core convictions.

this ecclesial culture?[3] How is it possible to set the parameters by which a church can be called baptist or baptistic? What justifies placing different churches under one umbrella, viewing them as one cultural or one ecclesial type? Thus, the subject of this chapter would be to define a target culture by focusing on a vision that makes baptistic believers distinct from other Christian types,[4] the vision that impacts their convictions and practices allowing them to be studied as one ecclesial type.

Chapter 6 transitions from description and analysis of the development of preaching to the question of baptistic identity. As it was already said, I follow the view of N. G. Wright, who argued that it is necessary to understanding 'who I am,' to be able to answer the question 'how I should live.' In order to answer the first question, it is necessary to define the constants or marks of identity that constitute and define a person or a group of people (Russian Baptist Church in my case).[5] I will employ the concept of the *baptist vision* as developed in McClendon's works, as the most helpful approach for the purpose of this work, which is an exploration on the formative nature of preaching in the Russian Baptist churches. I will follow in his thesis that what makes baptists a separate group of people, a separate ecclesial type, is a distinctive guiding vision:

> [T]he vision can be expressed as a hermeneutical principle: shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the

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[3] In the use of the phrase 'ecclesial culture,' I am following John Howard Yoder's critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's typology of Christ/Culture relationships, that it is based on a wrong assumption, since 'culture must be assumed to be a single bloc, which an honest and consistent approach would either reject entirely or accept without qualification; you must either withdraw from it *all,* transform it *all,* or keep it *all* in paradox. Niebuhr cannot conceive of, much less respect, a position which would not make a virtue of such consistency.' (John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of *Christ and Culture,*" in Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996), pp 54-55.) In a similar way, it is impossible to speak about *the Church* as one entity when addressing practices of the communities of believers. Thus, speaking about *churches* (plural) as different cultures might provide a solution. And so, an attempt to study preaching in Russian Baptist churches focuses on the practices of a particular Christian or ecclesial culture.

[4] On typology of Christian ecclesiologies, see Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania/ Waterloo, Ontario, Herald Press, 1985, 1968), pp 3-33.

[5] N. G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda*, p 11.

> eschatological community. In a motto, the church now is the primitive church and the church on the judgment day; the obedience and liberty of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth is our liberty, our obedience, till time's end.[6]

I want to stress here that the approach I am taking views "identity" as something robust and coherent around the vision.[7] Thus, my inquiry into the notion of baptistic identity cannot be separated from the vision that this peoplehood holds being a particular ecclesial culture. The vision that defines identity is actualised through a certain way of communal and individual living. However, the important question that is to be answered is how does this happen? Thus, I will try to identify a set of practices that actualise the vision. This, in turn, will create a framework for Chapter 7 where I will introduce and focus on the concept of powerful practices with preaching as one of them.

6.1 Various ways to define Baptist identity

The answer to the question of who are Baptists may be difficult to find. If this question is asked in Russia, most likely there will be at least two different responses. The outsiders may say that Baptists are a church/sect where people do not drink alcohol, do not smoke, and do not swear. The roots of such definition can be seen in the emphasis Russian Baptists always placed on ethical, holy living. In the Russian context, "holy living" first of all is associated with abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and places of entertainment, such as restaurants and theatres. Remarkably, however, most Russian Baptists are not able to provide a more in-depth definition. They might say that Baptists are not like Orthodox because they do not have icons, not like Pentecostals because they do not practice speaking in tongues, not like… etc.[8] Mykhailo Cherenkov notices, 'When we start answering a question "Who are we?"

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[6] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 29.

[7] Parush Parushev, "Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective." Dissertation thesis for Doctor of Philosophy degree awarded with distinction by Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 05 June 2007. (Available through ProQuest, UMI No. 3260231), p 107.

[8] Such difficulty with self-understanding is not a unique feature of Russian Baptists. Willian Powell Tuck expresses similar concern speaking about Baptists in the USA (*Our Baptist Tradition* (Macon, Georgia, Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Inc. 1993), p 1.).

with criticism of the Orthodox crosses and icons, when we hurry to expose somebody else, by this we build a negative identity.'[9]

Such difficulty in self-definition may seem strange since one simply needs to go to the website of the RUECB to find a very detailed description of what Baptists in Russia believe. However, since one of the marks of Russian Baptists was "doctrinal tolerance," when unity between churches was emphasized as something more important than identical beliefs,[10] this statement is neither an authoritative creed that every person has to sign to be allowed into a Baptist church, nor does it limit people to only one form of understanding and practicing their faith.[11] First of all, this long document of what Baptists believe serves as an explanation for the outsiders, providing them with a clear understanding of who Baptists are. It is even called *Veruem*, which means, *We Believe*. A majority of baptistic churches could accept most of the content of this statement. More than that, most Christian churches will also agree with it, without making it their official statement of faith, since this description of what Russian Baptists believe is a very general list of Christian convictions, without going into theological intricacies.

Sharp rightly points out that Baptists find it incredibly difficult to define their identity, due to their diverse historical backgrounds and contexts. Still today there is no consensus even about the origin of some groups of Baptists (as it is the case with the Baptist churches in Russia).[12] He refers to William Brackney's point that some Baptists trace their origins directly to Jesus or even better, to John the Baptist; others insist that they appeared under the Anabaptist influence; still others insist that every time the Holy Spirit forms a church according to biblical revelation that church can be classed as Baptist.[13]

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[9] Mykhailo Cherenkov, "Nash Baptism: Istoriia i Sovremennost" ["Our Baptism: History and Modern Era"], accessed on 12.12.2009, from http://cherenkoff.blogspot.com/2009/11/blog-post.html).

[10] Russian Baptist Union, *Veruem [We Believe]*, Accessed on 10.01.06 from http://baptist.org.ru/index.php/sub/believe_articles; Cf. Rostislav Krizhanovskii, *Kto Takiie Baptisty? [Who are Baptists?]* (Irpen, Dukhovnoie Vozrozhdeniie, 2012).

[11] See Chapter 3 of this research.

[12] Sharp, "Kto Takiie Baptisty Segodnia?" pp 106-107.

[13] William H. Brackney, *The Baptists* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1988), p xvii.

Perhaps, this inability of Baptists to define who they are can be explained by the absence of any rigid and authoritative creed, or even a simple set of doctrines that distinguishes Baptists from all other Christians, which is one of the baptistic principles. Baptists 'believe in a living faith and not one that can be stated in archaic terms that bind all Baptists forever in a creedal straitjacket.'[14] William L. Lumpkin wrote,

> The Baptist Movement has traditionally been non-creedal in the sense that it has not erected authoritative confessions of faith as official bases of organization and tests of orthodoxy. An authority which could impose a confession upon individuals, churches, or larger bodies, has been lacking, and the desire to achieve uniformity has never been strong enough to secure adoption of a fixed creed even if the authority for imposing it had existed.[15]

E. Y. Mullins in his account of Baptist beliefs argues that because the voluntary principle is the core principle of Christianity, therefore, the right of 'private judgment in religion' is the core right of Christian faith. Thus, a Baptist can never judge the representative of another denomination on the basis of any creed, since every person is free to exercise religious freedom.[16] Hence, when Baptists try to enforce their interpretation on other Baptists, it means that they themselves have moved away from what can be called 'authentic baptist.'[17] Therefore, according to Fisher Humphreys,

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[14] Tuck, *Our Baptist Tradition*, p 24.

[15] *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, Judson Press, 1959), p 16.

[16] E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1912), p 7.

[17] Tuck, *Our Baptist Tradition*, p 24.

Such rejection of any possible statement that restrict or limit others, can be well illustrated by a split among the members of the alumni of Spurgeon's College. The so called Downgrade Controversy was caused by Spurgeon's attempt to attack theological liberalism, by asking all the ministers who were trained at the Pastors' College Conference to sign a particular theological resolution. There were many who, even though they agreed with everything written in the resolution, refused to sign it and chose to leave the Conference because this was an attempt to restrict Christians in what they believed. (Ian M. Randall, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Pastors' College and the Downgrade Controversy," in K. Cooper and J. Gregory, eds., *Discipline and Diversity*, Studies in Church History, Vol. 43 (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2007), pp 366-76).

Baptists did have confessions of faith but not creeds. Creeds are understood as 'authoritative statements of what one must believe in order to belong to a particular church.' Confessions, in turn, were meant to be descriptions of those groups of believers who adopted them. "They are written and adopted to help Baptists communicate their beliefs to their own children, to their fellow Baptists, to Christians in other denominations, and to persons who are not Christians."[18] In this estimation, the information accessible through the website of Russian Baptists is a confession of faith, or as previously stated, a general description of what they believe.

The fact that different baptistic groups adopt slightly different confessions and the absence of one universal creed shows that this road to defining baptistic identity leads to a dead-end. As Parushev notices, 'Baptists… cannot represent ecclesial consensus of any sort, apart from the perspective of a single congregation at best; a kind of "A Baptist's" (R. Wayne Stacy, ed., *A Baptist's Theology* (Macon, Georgia, Smyth and Helwys, 1999), v-x.) theology —a compendium of the thoughts of some individual theologians.'[19] This lack of consensus, therefore, highlights the need for

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Another contemporary example of a split caused by reluctance to adopt a doctrinal statement compulsory for all the unions and local churches, comes from the life of the EBF. In 2005 two Baptist unions (the Baptist Union of Kazakhstan and the Baptist Union of Kyrgyzstan) demanded that the EBF accepted an official statement expressing their condemnation to such issues as women's ordained ministry, charismatic churches, homosexuality, and affirmation of the authority of the Bible. Moreover, they wanted this statement to be normative for all the Baptist Unions that belong to the EBF. Furthermore, unions that would have refused to sign this statement were to be excluded from the federation. The EBF response to the proposal was that Baptists did not have, and would not accept any statement of a kind, despite the fact that many might agree on some or even most of the issues raised. The unwillingness of the unions to agree to this principle caused some of them to split from the EBF (see Klaus Rösler, "EBF Saddened by Exit of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," accessed on 02.04.2015 from http://ebf.org/ebf-saddened-by-exit-of-kazakhstan-and-kyrgyzstan).

[18] Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What It Means to Us All* (Macon, Georgia, Smyth and Helwys Publishing Inc., 2002), p 46.

[19] Parushev, "Walking in the Dawn of the Light…," p 107. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, "Theologie op een baptistenmanier" [Doing Theology in a Baptist Way], in Teun van der Leer, red., *Zo zijn onze manieren! In Gesprek over gemeentetheologie,* Baptistica Reeks (Series), Vol.1 (Barneveld, Nederland: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, September 2009, in Dutch), pp. 7-22, 66-75.

discovering another, non-creedal way of defining the boundaries of this culture, of finding characteristics that would allow a church to be placed into this ecclesial type.[20]

Thus, the need is there. The question is, which way to go? There are a number of ways to address the issue of establishing the boundaries of the baptistic world. Different scholars and writers (both historians and theologians) offer diverse standards to identify a baptistic church. Different terminology is used in the field, such as Baptist identity, Baptist way of doing church, Baptist vision, Baptist beliefs, Baptist traditions, Gathering church, and others. Further in this section the use of the terminology by various authors will be introduced. However, in most cases, this would be a list of hallmarks, either shared with other Christians or unique to Baptists alone. I will proceed by offering two examples, which may provide an illustration of how the question of Baptist identity can be approached. Whilst noting the importance and usefulness of these approaches for the church, I will indicate their inability to answer the question that I have previously raised – which feature can serve as an "umbrella" for a wide range of churches that will allow them to be called baptistic. In other words what is baptistic identity, and therefore, how can baptistic unity in diversity, as well as their constant development and change can be explained (if at all).

Keith G. Jones suggests to address the question of Baptist identity by pointing to the holistic view of the church's beliefs and practices, which he called an Ortho-church. This approach places an emphasis on (1) orthodoxy, having the right beliefs; (2) orthopraxis, putting those beliefs into practice; (3) orthohexis, having the right attitude to others; and (4) orthopyre, having the right fire inside – the Holy Spirit. This way of approaching the issue of Baptist identity can be very useful, first of all, in its ability to

[20] In this discussion on the subject of baptistic identity, it is necessary to mention Statements on Identity produced by various international bodies, such as the Baptist World Alliance ("Statement on Identity" accepted at the Centenary Congress that took place in Birmingham, United Kingdom, in 2005), which was also adopted by the Council of the European Baptist Federation in 2006. The Statement provides an extensive list of Baptist convictions related to various areas of theology and ecclesiology. There are obvious benefits for having such a Statement, since it helps to define the place of the Baptist Church on the 'denominational map.' At the same time, the Statement does not create tight constraints for various Baptist churches, since it aims at providing information, rather than to be normative for its member unions and local churches (A short "Message from the Centenary Congress," which is based on fuller declaration, can be accessed at http://ebf.org/statement (accessed on 02.04.2015)).

serve as a mirror for churches, forcing individual congregations to ask whether they can be called an Ortho-church, thus having the potential of starting (if needed) a revisionary process of the church's convictions and practices.[21]

Humphrey's work provides another good illustration and a slightly different list of Baptist convictions. The author attempts to provide a comprehensive description of who Baptists are (in this case Southern Baptists are the focus). In the first part of the book he speaks about 'majority traditions' that Baptists share with all Christians, with Protestants, with Revivalists, and, which is most important for this work, those features that are uniquely Baptist.[22] According to Humphreys, there are eight major beliefs that all Baptists share: (1) only believers baptism; (2) baptism can be only by immersion; (3) believers' church is a result of believers' baptism; (4) autonomy of the local church; (5) democracy inside the church in discerning God's will; (6) cooperation between local churches for better witness; (7) the church is separated from the state; and (8) no creed but the Bible.[23] This account may serve as an explanation of who Baptists are, or are striving to be, to those outside the Baptist churches. In light of the general inability of Baptists to define themselves, this approach can also serve as a useful tool for better self-understanding, and for putting these principles into practice.

The existence of multiple volumes on this subject makes the task of discerning what the majority of Baptists believe only a matter of time. All one needs is to collect several confessions of different communities within the target group, analyse them and define the convictions which most Baptists share.[24] Of course, the above mentioned lists can be expanded, as different groups might add one feature or another. There might be arguments about whose understanding of certain points is more correct than that of others.[25] Nonetheless, this approach seems to be less helpful, when we consider that

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[21] Keith G. Jones, "Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy, Orthohexy, Orthopyre," in John H. Y. Briggs, general editor, *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2009), p 371.

[22] Humphreys, *The Way We Were*, p 48.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*.

[25] Chad Brand, David E. Hankins, Southern Baptist leaders in *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman and Holman

every baptistic characteristic has also characterised other groups of non-baptistic Christians. Moreover, there are very few (if any) features, which could be identified exclusively with baptistic culture.[26]

In addition, none of the above mentioned ways of approaching the subject of baptistic identity can answer the question, *What is it, that forms, unites and organises these beliefs into a coherent structure? What brings baptists into existence?* Thus, the previously mentioned ways of dealing with baptistic identity are helpful for understanding baptistic beliefs, which might be necessary in ecumenical dialogue or a mission field, or even for prompting churches to revise their practices.[27] However, any attempt to define the borders of baptistic culture by providing a set of beliefs, neither answers how these beliefs, these markers of baptistic identity, came into being, nor explains why different Baptist churches have slightly different sets of core convictions (different confessions of faith), nor allows one to understand why these communities emphasize different beliefs at various stages of their development.

Hence, the approach to understanding baptistic identity through the lens of their major beliefs in spite of all its usefulness and clarity, is of little help in explaining what makes these heirs of the Radical Reformation who they are, what is the 'guiding

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Publishers, 2006) may serve as a good example of such controversy. In their book, Hankins and Brand try to explain what it means to be a Baptist. Among several features they speak about *freedom of consciousness or soul competence.* However, because the Southern Baptist understanding of this subject defers from the perspective of some other groups of Baptists, they argue that their view is the correct one (p 17).

[26] Sharp, "Kto Takiie Baptisty Segodnia?", p 108.

[27] e.g. N. G. Wright's book *Free Church, Free State.* There the author reviews several 'Baptist marks' such as community of believers, baptism, communion, and compares them with similar practices of the Catholic Church. Yet, his analysis does not sound like another attempt to justify baptistic ways and to label Catholics as those who got it all wrong. Rather, it is a way of beginning a dialogue between these two traditions, highlighting the positive things in their perspectives and trying to find the way to understanding.

See also R. Stanton Norman, who presents four theological components, which are present, as he argues, in 'all writings on Baptist distinctives and are definitive for this genre.' These traits are epistemological, polemical, ecclesiological and the volitional. (*More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman and Holman, 2001), pp 15-22).

pattern by which people… shape their thought and practice.'[28] Therefore, another way of identifying Baptists is needed, which is neither a historic identity not a baptistic way of doing church (although both will be looked at), which implicitly refers to practices and beliefs. Instead, it might be helpful to use another term, *a guiding vision*, which carries a sense of moving forward, yet leaving space for a variety of contexts and cultures. This should be a *vision* that is clearly reflected in baptistic practices, and helps to explain the origin for the most important baptistic convictions. It should not be a simple list of convictional beliefs, but instead should serve 'as the touchstone by which authentic baptist convictions are discovered, described, and transformed, and thus as the organising principle around which an authentic baptist theology can take shape.'[29]

Thus, the focus is shifted from a recapitulation of major baptistic beliefs to a search for *a guiding vision* that can generate or cohere all the beliefs or convictions stated above. Moreover, this vision should provide a clear lead to the people who share it. Most importantly, it should explain how it affects people and their beliefs and practices. This search for a vision does not reject previous attempts to single out baptistic identity by pointing at their distinctives, but asks what causes them to be different. From this perspective, this is an attempt to discover convictions that precede visible implications of baptistic beliefs.[30] I would like to proceed with a story, which provides an insight into a life of a particular Christian community. Since identity is formed through participation in social life of a community,[31] reviewing and analysing community practices may serve as a mirror that reflects real convictions of that community.[32]

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[28] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 27.

[29] Ibid.

[30] This, according to McClendon, is one of the tasks of theology, which is 'the discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.' (McClendon, *Ethics*, p 23)

[31] The concept of identity development through social interaction is developed by Peter L. Berger in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1966) and *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1967).

[32] James Wm. McClendon Jr., Biography as *Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1974), p 19.

6.2 A story of the *Dobrovolets* [Volunteer] community

The history of the Baptist movement in Russia has attracted a lot of attention in recent years. However, although more and more work has been undertaken on previously neglected territory, such as life of various churches, regional associations and even individual pastors and missionaries, most of written history is still concentrated on "big names," who are considered to be the "apostles" of the Russian Baptist movement, such as Kargel, Prokhanov, Ryaboshapka, Pashkov, Voronin, Pavlov and others, or important events and hall-marks in the history of the baptistic movement. The number of works written about them will continue to grow, as historians discover new material, and as state archives are being gradually opened.[33] However, less significant events and people are often forgotten.

There are reasons for this omission. Little material exists about small churches or about people who did not become famous preachers or missionaries. There are various roots of this scarcity of historical material. Firstly, Russian culture is primarily an oral culture; the stories that were told in particular communities died with those who kept them. Secondly, being persecuted throughout their existence, Russian Baptists nonetheless preserved a missionary zeal, and were more interested in 'saving souls' and surviving the oppression than in writing books. Moreover, because a lot of them (particularly those people who could be considered as leaders) were killed or died in prisons, a significant part of their history did not survive. Thirdly, the majority of people who lived at that time either lacked education or did not see themselves and their lives significant enough to leave a record.[34] Finally, in many small communities, a conviction that the Bible was the only important book and that Christ would come very

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[33] Cf. Aleksandr Negrov and Tat'iana Nikolskaia, "Baptists as a Symbol of Sectaianism in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia," in Corrado and Pilli, *Eastern European Baptist History*; Nichols, *the Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality.*

[34] The story I am going to use can be a good example of such "insignificance" of their history in the eyes of its participants. The story of a Christian commune in Ivanovka, Voronezh Area, bears personal significance to me, since this is a story of my family. The main participants – Peter Leschev and Timofey Cheprasov – are my great-grandfathers. Nonetheless, neither of my grandmothers ever mentioned their story to me, until after I started to work on this project. When I asked them why they never spoke about it, they simply said, they had never thought it was of any importance.

soon were theological reasons for not leaving any written records. In the few following paragraphs, I will offer an insight into a less known history of Russian Baptists with a short story from a Baptist community that existed in the Voronezh Area.

World War I provides the starting point of the narrative. During the war, a young Russian solder, Peter Leschev, was taken prisoner by the German army and sent to Germany. It would have made a fascinating story about this time in Germany, which unfortunately will never be found. What matters, however, is that he became a Baptist while in Germany and brought this "new faith," as some people called it, back home, to the village of Ivanovka.[35] Leschev was very enthusiastic about his faith and kept telling people about God and salvation. His witness was rather successful – his seven brothers and one sister as well as their families, were soon baptised and also became Baptists. A small Baptist congregation from a nearby village, Semidesiatnoie, provided much needed spiritual support for this newly established community. In 1921 extended families of Leschev, Popov, Chernich, Ziablokov, Kukuev, Demidov, Cheprasov, Scherbakov, Chekmarev, Rukin and Smol'ianinov (approximately seventy people) prompted by the desire to live 'according to the teaching of Jesus, to be like the first church' decided to create a Christian *commune* or *brotherhood*.[36]

They lived in separate homes; however, they had common property and a community purse. The commune owned a lot of land, where they had built 25 new homes for its members, 3 mills, a smithy, granaries and they widened the river and planted large gardens. In 1926 "the brotherhood" bought three tractors. Some of their

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[35] One can only guess how many Russians have adopted the Baptist faith as a result of their interaction with German Baptists during their trips to Western Europe, but also through their contacts during the war, and whilst in captivity. it could be surmised, the overall number of Russian citizens who became Baptists in this manner could be rather significant. It could have had serious impact on the fast growth of the Baptist movement after the World War I and the Revolution of 1917. However, no research has been done (or may seem possible) on this question.

[36] Personal interview with M. Lesheva (Voronezh, 02.10.2007), available through the author. Konstantin Prokhorov mentions that when NEP (New Economic Policy) was introduced by the Soviets in the 1920s, many baptistic communities took it as God's gift and formed their own "Christian businesses." (*Bozie and Kesarevo* (Omsk, OOO Izdatelskii Dom "Nauka", 2005), p 225). The case that I refer to is different, since the main reason for the appearance of the commune was not some business interests, but the desire to live biblically.

members went to study mechanics, accounting, and agricultural technologies. As noted by Nikolay Shutkin, this was the first commune in the Voronezh region, and it prospered financially, due to their hard work and honesty, and thrived socially, having 'their own system of bringing up children.'[37] Various members had different skills which they contributed to the life of the commune in different ways. 'All the fruits of their labour were shared among all the members, no one had shortage of anything,' remembers Alexandra M. Cheprasova.[38]

The commune existed and prospered for about 10 years. After the Soviet government started collectivization,[39] in 1931 the commune was turned into a collective farm called "Dobrovolets" [Volunteer]. For a while, it continued to exist under a different label, without changing the way they lived. Their members still worked together. Each individual continued to receive clothes and food according to their needs. Their work was accompanied by singing Christian psalms and hymns, and every day was concluded with a worship service in the open air with all the inhabitants of the village participating. In the late 1930's Communist repressions began. Several families followed their husbands/fathers who were sent to prisons or labour camps located in distant parts of the USSR. Some member-families were killed in the World

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[37] Nikolay Shutkin, a secular historian from Voronezh, is one of the people whose family lived in Ivanovka, but was forcefully moved, when his parents were given a prison term in Solovki during Stalin's persecutions in later 1930s. His detailed description of the life of the commune points to the fact that many of its members have been to Europe during the war, and thus, experienced a different way of life. This was one of the reasons for them building their agricultural business differently from locally accepted forms. ("Selo Ivanovka" ["The village of Ivanovka"], in N. G. Pegarkov, ed., *Zemlia Khokhol'skaia [The Land of Khokhol]* (Voronezh, Izd. im E. A. Volkhovitinogo, 1998) pp 57-58).

[38] A. Cheprasova, personal interview (Voronezh, 01.10.2007), available through the author.

[39] Collectivization was a process of the formation of collective farms, when independent farmers were invited (and those who didn't accept the invitation were forced) into it. Those who disagreed were robbed and either killed or sent to Siberia, a place where political prisoners were sent. In the Soviet time, most of the concentration camps were located there – prisoners had to work in extreme weather conditions without proper nutrition or clothing. Many thousands, some say even millions of people, died there (e.g. O. V. Khlevnyuk, "Politburo. Mekhanizmi Politicheskoi Vlasti v 30-e Godi" ["Politburo. Mechanisms of Political Power in 1930-s"], in *Rossiiskaia Politicheskaia Entsiklopediia (ROSSPEN) [Russian Political Encyclopaedia]* (Moscow, ROSSPEN, 1996), Chapter 1).

War II. Others had moved into the city of Voronezh. Many outsiders, including a number of fanatical Communists, deliberately moved into the village and joined the collective farm, radically affecting the dynamics of communal Christin life.[40] So, shortly after the end of the World War II, when two more families were arrested and sent to serve their prison sentence in Siberia, *Dobrovolets* ceased to exist.

Let me touch upon some preaching themes and the role of the Bible in the *Dobrovolets* community. Such an examination can provide a clear picture of what it meant to be a Christian, what it meant to read the Bible, and what the Bible itself meant for people. Since having a Bible was prohibited by the Soviet state, the adult members of the community hid their Bibles and studied them secretly. Their study often took place at night and outside of their homes – in the fields or in the forests, where they gathered in groups or in pairs to read and reflect on the Scripture. Maria Lesheva, whose father was the founder of the commune, said that she had never actually seen him reading the Bible. More than that, she had never seen the Bible in the house.[41] Nonetheless, the Bible was read and studied in groups. Biblical stories were preached and retold to children and to other members of the commune.

Some stories were so vivid that even eighty years later, they are still remembered by those who heard them. The story of the second coming of Jesus meant that everyone was to be ready for His coming. Being ready did not mean to have right relationships with God, but, first of all, it meant living according to His Word. The life according to God's Word included the fear of rejecting or betraying Jesus (the stories of Judas or Peter became the stories of many who rejected Christ when they faced a threat of being killed or robbed by communists), which was relevant at the time when Christianity was suppressed, when it was dangerous to be a follower of the Way. Following the narrow way that led to Eternal life was another story that was frequently told.[42] The way of Jesus required "purity of heart" which was a life of

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[40] A. Cheprasova, personal interview (Voronezh, 01.10.2007), available through the author.

[41] M. Lesheva, personal interview (Voronezh, 02.10.2007), available through the author.

[42] Cf. The story of Ryaboshapka in Marina S. Karetnikova, "Russkoie Bogoiskatelstvo: Natsionalniie Korni Evangelskogo-Baptistskogo Dvizheniia" ["Russian search for God: National Roots of the Evangelical-Baptist Movement"], in Karetnikova, *Al'manakh Po Istorii Russkogo Baptisma,* Vol.1*,* p 206.

obedience to God in every aspect, total self-denial and readiness to sacrifice, suffering and even "death on a cross" was considered a normal part of Christian life. Jesus' command to love their enemies (Matthew 5) made the members of the commune welcome anyone, including staunch communists into their community; the words about obedience to the authorities (Rom. 13) led to hard work as the only way to prove they were good citizens of the Soviet state; the story about the first church sharing their possessions (Acts 2) became a foundation for their *experiment* of communal living with shared property and finances.

One of the most prominent stories recalled in the community, was the story of Exodus. In order to reach the Promised Land the children of Israel had to have pure hearts, had to trust God's leadership, and had to follow Him through the narrow path of testing and temptations. This was the story of Russian Baptists. The story of suffering and endurance going through the spiritual desert of communist rule, nonetheless, leading them into the Promised land of God's eternal Kingdom.[43] The story of Exodus was a story of people who despite all hardships of the desert *followed* God, a story that helped Christians in *Dobrovolets commune* to survive by emphasizing the importance of faithfulness and following in the life of a Christian. What enabled such reading? The understanding of the Bible as their book, the book of the church; those people were reading biblical stories as their story, they saw biblical characters not only as real people who lived in the past, but they saw themselves being described by the biblical authors. McClendon called this 'the plain sense' of Scripture that allowed the church to continue to read the Text, understand it and apply it to their lives. For the disciples of Jesus the 'Bible was not a code or cipher to be cracked; it was not a book of secrets; it was realistic; it spoke plain.'[44] Of course there were abuses and misinterpretations, of course there were occasional extremes, yet this allowed the church to survive, and to continue witnessing to people despite the hardships they had faced.

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[43] This account is based on personal interviews of the researcher with A. Cheprasova (Voronezh, 01.10.2007), M. Lesheva (Voronezh, 02.10.2007) and L. Onischenko (Voronezh 15.08.2007).

[44] Hans W. Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?" in F. McConnell, ed., *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986), pp 36-77, quoted after McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 36.

A peculiar way to read the Scripture

The example from the history of Voronezh Baptists brings out a key issue for understanding the baptistic vision: the role of the Bible is obviously difficult to overestimate. The importance of the Bible, its literal reading and application to the life of the members of the community is emphasized in almost every attempt to identify the baptistic way or the baptistic vision. From the first communities of Stundists in the south of the Russian Empire, to the first Baptist church in Tiflis, and gatherings in aristocratic palaces in St. Petersburg – the uniting feature of all these diverse groups is the position and the role of the Bible for their life and worship. The reading of the Book was the discovery of the story of these people, their lost story. An attempt to recover that narrative and apply it to their lives resulted in the formation of Baptist churches in Russia.

Of course, this feature is not uniquely Baptist. Sometimes, extreme biblical literalism leads churches into troubles. Situations when the Bible is raised to the position of self-sufficient god appear for one reason, when the Scripture is perceived as a Book that tells us how 'we can be made right with God. Personal salvation and justification by grace through faith are the essence of it all and anything else is a matter of indifference or, worse still, law.'[45] Therefore, the role of the Scripture is reduced to some historical value, allowing its readers to find out about Jesus and His death and resurrection, and, possibly, to discover what people need "to be saved." Moreover, because the prescription of how to be saved and other important doctrines cannot be easily distilled, or because it can be discovered only by an educated minister who can then teach and preach them to the "flock/congregation," then, even though highly respected or worshipped, the Bible loses its real transformational power. Obviously, there is no reason to read something one either doesn't understand or cannot apply. Thus, the Scripture becomes effectively removed from the congregational life, and is only occasionally referred to (in Sunday worship services).

Nevertheless, In spite of all the possible extremes that Baptists can slip into, baptistic biblicism turns from "worshipping the book" to being people, who live by this Book. The whole of life has to be affected by it. The Bible becomes the book, where they discover the way to live as a community of believers. It is not a book about 'how to be

[45] Wright, *Free Church*, p 2.

saved,'[46] but a book of life. This book is written for the church to follow, truly functioning 'as a congregational textbook, source of sermons, classroom handbook, devotional guide, practical norm.'[47] Such a baptistic vision serves as a hermeneutical tool that encourages reading the Bible not as a distant historical account, but as something people could relate to their lives.

A brief summary might be required at this stage. The starting point of this chapter was the question of baptistic identity. Is there something that different people who are called by different names all over the globe hold in common, something that is sufficient enough to put them into one ecclesial type, into one group called "Baptists"? It is not a set of doctrines, as most of these free churches or unions of churches do not have (or do not share) confessions of faith. Neither is it a list of some hall-marks, or major convictions that they share (at least partially).

Since none of these ways of defining baptistic identity proved to be helpful for this work, another approach is needed. It should be one organising principle, one vision that could serve as a guiding stimulus, a source of all major distinctiveness and commonalities. In my search, I have used a story showing how a biblical narrative was used by a particular community in difficult circumstances. This brought me to the supposition that the hermeneutics employed by these communities is the key element. In my next step, I would like to turn to the ideas developed by James McClendon, as they have been most helpful for this part of my project.

6.3 The *baptist vision* and the theological method of James Wm. McClendon Jr.

The previous section ended with a suggestion that a baptistic vision is a particular way of reading and applying the Bible, a form of a literalism, claiming that this is how the Bible is read in baptistic communities. Now, it would be useful to turn to a theologian who has grounded his systematic theology in such an understanding

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[46] R. Alan Culpepper argues that this view is completely opposite to John Calvin's perspective on the purpose of the Scripture, as a book that leads people to salvation (salvation here is understood in its narrow meaning, as an event that takes place at a person's repentance – acceptance of the fact that he/she is a sinner and asking Jesus to forgive their sins) (R. Alan Culpepper, "Scripture," in R. Wayne Stacy, ed., *A Baptist's Theology* (Macon, Georgia, Smyth and Helwys, 1999), p 89).

[47] McClendon, *Doctrines*, p 35.

of the *baptist vision* – James Wm. McClendon Jr. I am far from arguing that his understanding of the way baptistic Christians read the Bible is unique. Other theologians have similar views and I will refer to them later. However, what is unique about McClendon, and is, perhaps, one of the major reasons for referring to his trilogy *Systematic Theology,* is his conviction that this particular way of reading the Bible is the guiding stimulus that has played and continues to play the main role in shaping baptistic communities. He claims that baptists 'in all their variety and disunity failed to see in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices, their own guiding vision, a resource for theology unlike the prevailing tendencies round about them,' which often led them to disappointing results – 'baptists became the victim of ideologies left and right – and thereby became less themselves, spiritually impoverishing both themselves and their neighbours in other Christian churches.'[48] Such a claim leads him to recognize the need to define a 'theological centre' in order to be able to do any theological work, which is the starting point of his systematic theology. What makes it even more important for my project is the understanding that 'the vision so understood is a necessary and sufficient organising principle for a (baptist) theology.'[49]

Thus, the next section of my work will offer a short review of McClendon's theological views. I will try to show his theological method as an example of how his understanding of the *baptist vision* serves as an organising principle for theology. I will introduce several main concepts, necessary for understanding his theology and show their connection and interdependence, which will highlight the importance of the *baptist vision* understood as a particular hermeneutical principle.

In the next step, I will concentrate on McClendon's understanding of the role of the *baptist vision*. Based on his view of theology as a study of convictions (and practices, as embodied convictions), it is possible to slightly extend McClendon's his claim for the role of the *baptist vision*: *The vision so understood is a necessary and sufficient tool for understanding convictions and practices of the baptistic communities, and therefore,*

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[48] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 26.

[49] Ibid., p 33.

preaching, as one of them. Such a change bridges the gap between the biblical narrative vision of the baptistic communities and the practice of proclamation.

Therefore, the outline for this section will be as follows: I will start with a short review of McClendon's theology that will conclude with his perspective on the Baptist vision. This introduction to baptistic hermeneutics will bring me to understanding the reading of the Scripture as a practice. I will claim that McClendon's *baptist vision* can work only when there is a set of practices of reading the Scripture and discovering its meaning in the community of believers with the practice of preaching, as one of those practices.

Biography as theology

Quoting the title of an essay, written by Steven W. Jolley on the theological method of McClendon, is a useful starting point for this short summary of McClendon's theology. 'Biography, baptist and the Book' – these three words, as Jolley states, are the key words to understanding McClendon's theology.[50] In short, it means that first, convictions expressed in a particular way of life are the material that theology works with.[51] Second, McClendon's theology is done from the baptistic perspective and always requires a community of reference – it can and should be done in the church and for the church.[52] Finally, third, the Bible is not a mere history, but a living textbook, the source of images and stories that Christians apply to their lives.[53] McClendon's theology is a baptistic theology done by a Baptist. This is an important starting point for understanding his method following his belief that Christian theology must have a community of reference. Similarly Rowan Williams noted that

> the theologian is always beginning in the middle of things. There is a practice of common life and language already there, a practice that defines a specific shared way of interpreting human life as lived in relation to God.

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[50] Steven W. Jolley "Biography, baptist and the Book: An Essay on the Theological Method of James Wm. McClendon," *Baptistic Theologies,* Vol. 7, No 2 (Autumn, 2015, forthcoming). Here and elsewhere references to the citations will be given following the unpublished manuscript available through the author.

[51] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 23.

[52] Ibid., p 19.

[53] McClendon, *Biography as Theology* (1974), p 176.

> The theologian emerges as a distinct and identifiable figure when these meanings have become entangled with one another, when there is a felt tension between images or practices, when a shape has to be drawn out so that the community's practice can be effectively communicated.[54]

McClendon's community of reference is baptistic communities, the heirs of the Radical Reformation. Other theologians or historians sometimes use other terms such as "Believers Church," "Free Church." He uses the term "baptist," indicating that it is not limited to one denomination of Baptists.[55] The need for a community of reference is expressed in the task of theology: it is not a creation of doctrines that later should be marketed by pastors (this is the task of the church, which is called primary theology). The task of the doctrinal theology is a second order task, a step back from the teaching of the church, its critical revision, so that it can bring positive improvement back to the church and her practices.[56] Thus, without a church and its primary theology, there is neither a place nor a reason for the existence of secondary, academic theology. Similarly, Paul S. Fiddes argues that when theology is separated from the community, it ceases to be theology. He says,

> Theology in some university faculties [in the UK] has become detached from the life and mission of the church. It has become a field of study using the same methods of investigation and research as other humanities, and has often obtained respectability by becoming simply identified with Religious Studies – an important discipline but a separate one from theology.[57]

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[54] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), p xii.

[55] For the criteria of either including or excluding a community into the "baptistic type," see the section on the *baptist vision*.

[56] McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp 24, 33; cf. Parush R. Parushev, "Carrying out the Theological Task in a Baptistic Way," *Baptistic Theologies,* Vol. 6, No 1 (Spring, 2014), pp 53-71. David H. Kelsey also makes the distinction between primary and secondary theology in his *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), pp 19-22

[57] Paul S. Fiddes, "Theology and a Baptist Way of Community," in P. S. Fiddes, ed., *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way* (Oxford, Whitley Publications, 2000), p 21. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, who argued that theology always belongs to particular communities, being a reflection of their experiencing God. He suggested that since there are different communities

This brings us to the question of what theology is.

McClendon's attempt to provide a definition of theology begins with the presupposition that a definition should not be 'an intellectual straitjacket.' It should be able to make sense of what was done in the past, but at the same time it should be 'neither loaded in favour of some newly chosen doctrinal or methodological way, nor so restrictive that creative development is foreclosed by the very definition.'[58] Thus, the way to approach it is by admitting the fact that theology is about something important for people.[59] Theology is about what people believe in, which introduces a vital term in McClendon's approach – convictions. In their book, McClendon and Smith argued that who we are, how we live and behave is defined by our convictions. Convictions are not just opinions (something that we easily acquire and reject); they constitute our real self.[60]

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of faith, there should exist different types of theologies, like Catholic theology, Protestant theology, etc. (*The Christian Faith*, transl. H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh, T&T. Clark, 1968), pp 88-93).

[58] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 22. Hans W. Frei approached the subject of theology from a similar perspective. Defining theology in his work, he indicated that theology should be viewed as 'an instance of a general class or generic type and is therefore to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence, and truth that it must share with other academic disciplines.' Moreover, according to him, theology is 'an aspect of Christianity and is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes that religion.' (*Types of Christian Theology,* ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992) p 2.)

[59] In a bit of a personal narrative of his experience with people and their understanding of theology McClendon wrote, 'Thus my secret, or perhaps unconcealed, amazement when men reveal that they think of theology as essentially a tranquilizer of the urge to know the truth, or a coldstorage locker for preserving dogmas. For me theology has been more often a trial by ordeal, the very arena of conscientiousness. Given that personal history, one may ask why I did not abandon the discouragement of theological inquiry for some sunnier task. To which the best answer is the plain one that it still seems to me that there is no more important inquiry than the one which sets out to answer those whence and why and whither questions (or slightly updated versions of them), and my slow theological upbringing had the further effect of giving me time to discover that philosophers, for example, had no better answers to those questions than did their theological counterparts. In a word, some problems *are* hard problems, and turning away from them if they are my problems is neither easy nor a solution.' (*Biography as Theology,* p 89).

[60] McClendon and Smith, *Convictions,* p 5.

There are two important assumptions in this definition. First is the assumption that convictions 'are commonly shared,' which means that both individual people and whole communities possess convictions. Furthermore, convictions produce a formative effect on those who share them. The second important element is implied in the definition that there are different kinds of convictions. As McClendon puts it, 'One group may be formed by convictions about God and neighbour, another by convictions about guns, girls, and gold.'[61] Obviously, different convictions influence one another, modifying and changing them. Thus, as convictions are interdependent and are formed in different ways, through different experiences, there is an important conclusion to be made. The understanding of theology as gathering data about God (based on the etymology of the word "theology") or an attempt to work out the 'true theology'[62] should be rejected as something that cannot be achieved, since all convictions (or beliefs), including those about God and the church, are formed and may vary simply because of different life experiences or practices of the community one belongs to.

Since there is often a difference in what a church claims to believe and how it lives, and since true convictions are always embodied in life, there is little value in looking at a set of propositions that some call "Christian convictions" and singled out as churches' statements of faith. McClendon believes that it is biography, the life story that is shaped by convictions (but also that is shaping convictions), that should be explored in order to understand the real convictions of the community. It is the 'living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities' thus allowing us to understand real convictions by looking into lives, making 'theology… at least biography.'[63] However, it is important to note that McClendon does not suggest that the outcomes of the biographical study, the discovered convictions/beliefs, can be recommended as universal. As Jolley noted, 'life stories are investigated in light of the particular community and its particular convictions, and to consider how these lives reflect this set

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[61] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 23.

[62] Karl Rahner, "Theology," in Karl Rahner, ed., *Sacramentum Mundi, an Encyclopaedia of Theology,* Vol. 6 (New York, Herder and Herder, 1970).

[63] McClendon, *Biography as Theology* (1990), 22.

of beliefs.'[64] This is done in order for the teaching of the church, its doctrines, to be 'consistent with the lived experience of those who embrace such beliefs… The value of this consistency… is its living contact with theological doctrines that creates an appeal for others to embrace that sort of Christian life.'[65]

McClendon arrives at the following definition of theology, 'It is the discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.'[66] There are several implications in this definition. Firstly, it implies that theology is both descriptive and normative, which indicates its self-involving character. Self-involving character does not mean that only Baptists can be engaged in doing Baptist theology, or that, for example, a Christian may not be engaged in Muslim theology. However, according to McClendon, it just proves the rule that 'in convictional work, self-involvement is natural and appropriate, while disengagement requires to be explained case by case.'[67] Hence, this is a second implication, it shows the importance for a theologian to be a part of a community of faith, to share the story of this community, so that he/she could not only understand its convictions, but, and here is its normative or revisionist part, also ask questions, express doubts, and question the practices of this community, which hopefully will result in stronger, sounder beliefs and practices, thus producing greater integrity of the community's character.[68]

This view of theology transforms it from boring (as many people perceive it) and a useless activity done by some disconnected from the ordinary world scholars,[69] into a relevant and exciting task of understanding ourselves, our convictions, critically

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[64] Jolley, "Biography, baptist and the Book," p 6.

[65] Ibid.

[66] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 23.

[67] Ibid., p 39.

[68] Jolley, "Biography, baptist and the Book".

[69] A very common view shared by many people outside of the seminaries, not only non-Christians, but even many pastors and ordinary members of the church. See Cherenkov, "Nash Baptism: Istoriia I Sovremennost."

examining them and 'creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.'[70] This definition of theology as a study of convictions that are expressed in biography, and embodied in life, explains the necessary pluralistic character of theology. Christians always understand the Lord they follow and the Gospel they have through their experience, understood as 'what we have lived through and lived out in the company with one another,'[71] thus introducing 'a contextual, not a sinful, pluralism into the theological task.'[72]

Let me bring this very short review of McClendon's theology to a conclusion: Christian (and any other) faith is about something deeply self-involving. McClendon calls this – convictions. True convictions (our true beliefs) are embodied in a particular form of life, not in the form of propositional statements or creeds. Therefore, in order to understand what an individual Christian and/or a Christian community believe, one needs to study its biography, its life. Biography is important not only because convictions are

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[70] McClendon, *Biography as Theology* (1990), p 20.

[71] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 37.

[72] Ibid., p 35.

Such understanding of theology as contextual may raise a question about whether it is a relativistic approach. Does it justify any set of convictions or beliefs? This issue was addressed in McClendon and Smith's book *Convictions*, where they argue that the two extreme approaches to convictions were imperialistic and relativistic approaches. The first argued that 'convictional differences can be eliminated by the application of the correct method and the correction of (others') character defects' (p 9) while the second insists that the conflict between rival convictional sets cannot be resolved at all, as 'convictional differences are inevitable, ineradicable, and ultimate fact of human existence' thus making 'even communication at any significant level along these lines… impossible' (p 8), thus, people should simply accept it and leave it as something given. The authors reject both of these approaches and offer their own approach – perspectivism, which 'regards convictional conflict as expected, but not inevitable, fundamental, but not ultimate, enduring but not inherently ineradicable.' People and communities do have different convictions, and 'will experience, think, and speak about their worlds differently, and these differences will not necessarily be the result of mistakes or character flaws.' But these differences are not walls that cannot be overcome, thus 'communication, understanding, or even persuasion among words' is possible (p 9). (McClendon, Smith, *Convictions*). See also Parush R. Parushev, "Convictional Perspectivism: A Constructive Proposal for a Theological Response to Postmodern Conditions," in John Currie and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in Context: Explorations inspired by Andrew Kirk* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 111-124.

expressed in actions, but also because they are formed by experiences of life. However, experience alone, although important, is not the only element that contributes to the formation of one's Christian faith. The Bible is the other, second element. Therefore, while it comes second in this work, it is in no way less important in its formative power. Now I am going to turn to the Bible and its role in McClendon's theology.

The baptist vision

Ethics, the first volume of McClendon's Systematic Theology, begins with the quest for a baptist vision. There are a few reasons for having such a starting point. Firstly, that it is an attempt 'to overcome the poverty of baptist theology' by recovering a 'standpoint for theological reflection' and by retrieving 'diverse baptist voices as partners for theological conversation.'[73] Another reason comes directly from the definition of theology. By understanding theology as a study of the convictions of a convictional community, the first question to be answered is how to define the borders of this community and what constitutes a distinctive set of convictions. In the case of looking at baptistic community, the question turns into a quest for a theological centre, an organising principle for baptistic theology, which can be seen as a starting point in defining the community of reference, whose convictions and practices a theologian is going to discover and possibly transform.

McClendon begins his search by reviewing several 'persistent marks of the heirs of the Radicals,' which are biblicism, mission, liberty, discipleship, and community. He analyses different attempts to define the major conviction or belief that should organise the rest. However, he arrives at the following conclusion: none of the traditional baptistic hallmarks can serve as a cornerstone for baptistic theology. Therefore, he offers another approach. He accepts biblicism as the key starting point in defining the vision. However, this biblicism is different than simply a literal understanding of the Scripture, since the authority of the Bible, and its normative nature is a mark of all Christian traditions, and not something uniquely baptistic.[74] The difference then is in the

[73] Curtis W. Freeman, "The 'Coming of Age' of Baptist Theology in Generation Twenty-Something," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* Vol. 27, No 1 (2000), p 22.

[74] In his reflection on 'baptistic biblicism,' McClendon indicates that 'biblicist literalism' is 'more of a characteristic of the Reformed movement.' Also he is referring to the problems of the Reformed

way the Bible is read and applied. McClendon claims that the Bible can be a starting point only when it works as a 'link between the church of the apostles and our own.'[75]

At this point, it is necessary to remember that by looking for a *vision*, or a 'baptistic idea,' McClendon does not simply look for a practice or a belief that is inseparable from a particular denomination, but for a certain conviction (or a practice) that would serve as a source of all the others convictions and practices. As noted by Freeman in the introduction to the first volume of McClendon's *Systematic Theology*, his *baptist vision* 'is not so much a denominational, historical, or sociological account as much as it is a theological standpoint.'[76] Thus, the key to understanding baptistic convictions is neither a practice of 'baptism,' nor is it a 'community' (although 'community' is extremely important, since communal reading and communal interpretation of the Bible is at the heart of the vision), nor 'mission' or 'discipleship.' They all are 'living instance[s] of this vision at work.' [77] According to McClendon, the vision that serves as the key to understanding baptistic theology and is the centre of the baptistic way of life, can be expressed in a form of a hermeneutical principle. It is

> shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community. In a motto, the church now is the primitive church and the church on the judgment day; the obedience and liberty of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth is our liberty, our obedience, till time's end.[78]

Puritans caused by their desire to 'apply Old Testament law to England and America.' (James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "The baptist Vision," in *Baptistic Theologies,* Vol. 6, No 1 (Spring, 2014), pp 23-35) The attempts to use biblical texts literally created troubles in Russian Baptist churches as well. Even today, there are people who preach about the importance of 'head-coverings' for women, the impossibility of women being involved in ministry, insisting that this is the message of the Bible. At the same time, the Bible speaks about many things, which they either cannot find explanation for or feel uncomfortable with (for example, the gifts of the Holy Spirit) for which they create ornate explanations, thus forsaking literalism that they argue for.

[75] McClendon, *Ethics*, 30.

[76] McClendon, *Ethics,* reprinted by the Baylor University Press in 2012, p xiii.

[77] McClendon, "The baptist Vision," p 32.

[78] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 29.

In short, the vision is expressed in a motto "this is that" and "then is now."[79] "This is that" is a quotation from the King James Version of the Bible (Acts 2:16) that McClendon uses as an example of how a suggested way of reading and applying the Scripture is rooted in the Bible. As an example of such hermeneutics, McClendon suggests the book of Acts and the narrative of the day of Pentecost. When God poured the Holy Spirit on the Disciples, transforming them from irresolute, cowardly people into a bold and courageous group of Jesus' messengers, Apostle Peter proclaimed to the people gathered in Jerusalem who heard Disciples speaking in different languages,

> But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.[80]

Peter said that the events described in the prophecy were happening that day. He used the phrase 'this is that' to relate the phenomenon to the prophecy. The fact that the prophet might have been referring to different events, maybe even for his own time 'cannot falsify Peter's claim.' This device is used repeatedly in the Scriptures when 'one set of events and circumstances is applied under divine guidance to another set of events and circumstances.'[81] Hatchett indicates that Baptists found multiple narratives of evangelism and conversion in the book of Acts, that later helped them to overcome persecutions, and directed their mission efforts.[82] He particularly

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[79] Recently Barry Harvey has argued that the cupola 'is' in 'this is that' motto carries certain ambiguity about the immediacy of connecting with the primitive church if applied forcefully. In his view McClendon's formulation has to be viewed as similitude "this as that." See his "'This as That': Friendly Amendments to James McClendon's "baptist" Vision," in *Baptistic Theologies,* Vol. 6, No 1 (Spring 2014), pp 36-52.

[80] Quoted from the King James Version of the Bible.

[81] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 29. See also James Wm. McClendon Jr., "Primitive, Present, Future: A Vision for the Church in the Modern World," in Richard T. Hughes, *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp 98-108. See also McClendon, *Doctrine*, pp 36-37.

[82] Cf. H Wheeler Robinson argues that Scripture is authoritative and formative because the readers can have the same religious experience as biblical characters. In this, Baptists differ from other

emphasizes that Paul's conversion as described in Acts with its themes 'of confrontation with a living Jesus, suffering, testimony, and mission' was something like a 'type-story' for Baptists.[83] The examples previously used from the history of Russian Baptists, who identified themselves with biblical people, when they spoke about their story being a story of Exodus, serve as another illustration of this approach.

"Then is now," the second, eschatological part of the vision, is directed into the future.[84] Yet this future outlook is not simply some data of what is to come, 'rather, this is information about what is of ultimate importance here and now,'[85] thus defining the mundane life of Christians. It sees the church of today as the church of judgment day and seeks the Holy Spirit in directing the church into the future. The important emphasis to be made here is that this vision looks both backwards and forward, as a prophetic vision, a pattern that has been used by baptistic Christians throughout their history.

The existence of such a vision explains why Baptist communities cannot have a rigid creed - they read the Bible not as a book with propositions, not as a book of rules, but as a book of stories, the book of their story. Moreover, this story is always new because the people are always changing, passing through different places in their journeys. "This is that" is a powerful way for people to see themselves, and make the old Story relevant and liveable for their immediate life. However, the eschatological dimension, "then is now" adds something to the vision, which makes continuous contextual interpretation and reinterpretation possible. This is the prophetic element

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Christians, for whom Scriptural authority lies primarily in its ability to issue right commands, directing to salvation. For Robinson, the Bible is not a "text-book," but a "source-book", allowing believers to live through the written story. (*The Life and Faith of Baptists* (London, Kingsgate Press, 1966), pp 7-18.)

[83] Randy Hatchett, "The Hermeneutics of Conversion," in Gary Furr and Curtis W. Freeman eds., *Ties That Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision* (Macon, Georgia, Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1994), pp 34-35. For more examples of using the biblical story as a "type-story" see Ian M. Randall, "Eastern European Baptists and the Evangelical Alliance, 1846-1896," in Corrado and Pilli, *Eastern European Baptist History*, p 15.

[84] Cf. Bill J. Leonard speaks about eschaton as a paradox, since 'it is at once present and future.' ("Eschatology," in Stacy, *A Baptist's Theology,* pp 206-207.) Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York, Harper and Row, 1975), p 192.

[85] Jolly, "Biography, Baptists and the Book," p 10.

of the vision, the understanding that the Bible is not enough for the life of the church. She needs the Holy Spirit to interpret and reinterpret the story from the past into the story of the future, the story of the life of the church. In this way mere history turns into an open-ended eschatological narrative.[86]

Therefore, the "then is now" element makes baptistic tradition a living, developing tradition, constantly revising itself. Different views on baptism,[87] diverse perspective on atonement,[88] even dissimilar main baptistic principles (e.g. liberty or emphasis on Biblicism) highlighted at different times in variety of contexts – all may serve as examples of this reading strategy. They are all rooted in the Bible, but changing circumstances bring forward different insights; they are refashioned and retold to continue serving God's people as living guidance for a particular time and space.[89] Thus, this is a guiding vision marked by biblicism – the Bible as a story of the church, the book where the church finds itself and receives directions for the life today as well as goals for the future.

The vision provides not only a way for baptistic believers to read and understand the Bible, but also a way that allows them to be followers of Jesus, since it is 'marked by a textual immediacy – a sense that Christ is present and speaking to the assembly through the scripture.'[90] This vision shows 'how a people's identity is construed by means of narratives that while historically set in another time and place nevertheless

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[86] Parush R. Parushev, "Baptist and Society," a lecture from the IBTS series on Baptistic identity and theology at the Post-graduate Seminar, Prague, IBTS, 24.10.2007. Unpublished paper available through the author.

[87] Wright, *Free Church*, p 74.

[88] See McClendon, *Doctrine,* Chapter 5. The Saving Cross: Atonement, pp 197-237.

[89] Speaking about atonement, about what Jesus has achieved, McClendon asks, 'whether these facts [Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection] are to be seen as mere antiquities… or whether the Christian facts just cited are to be seen in vital developing continuity with the living witness of persons of our own time.' (*Biography as Theology* (1974), p 176). This question re-emphasizes the role of the guiding vision, and the living role of the Bible, when the context is not neglected, remains relevant God's Word for his people where they are.

[90] Hatchett, "The Hermeneutics of Conversion," p 37.

display redemptive power in the present time and place.'[91] Therefore, baptistic identity can be defined as a robust, clearly visible identity, which is 'a baptistic or congregational way of being a Christian community. The baptistic vision works to keep the community centred not on the story alone, but on Christian discipleship in the world as a people whose lives are to reflect the life of those called to embody the Jesus way.'[92]

Conclusion

In conclusion, Biography and the Book are the two elements that are at the heart of McClendon's theology, thus supporting his argument that the *baptist vision*, understood as a contextual reading and application of the biblical story, using the 'this is that, then is now' strategy, is a sufficient organising principle for the whole of baptistic theology. Human convictions are formed through different participations in the life of the community. With Christians, it is a Christian community that contributes to the development and formation of their convictions, particularly convictions about God, Christ, and the Church, and moral convictions[93] of how they should relate to the world outside the church. The practices of the church are rooted in the Scripture that is read as the Story of the church, used as a mirror, reflecting the contemporary situation as well as the way into the future for those people who read it. Naturally, they read it through the lenses of their convictions, formed by their Christian community as well as secular communities to which they belong.

Biography, living together in a community of a local church and as separate individuals, influences baptistic reading and understanding of the Bible, producing practices that result in certain convictions. Thus, life experience affects their Bible-reading. However, Bible reading also helps believers to interpret their life-story, to

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[91] McClendon, *Ethics*, 33. Cf. "We follow our Lord, aware that he may always have further light to cast on our pathway and new truth to teach us about his Father, the world, our neighbour, and ourselves. We confess that our religious knowledge, like all knowledge, is partial and incomplete and is in continuous search for deeper and newer insights. Therefore, we refuse to say we have ever arrived spiritually or have the ultimate interpretation about God or the scriptures… We trust Christ who goes before us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to have a word for us today. Our theology is not confined to the past but awaits God's word for us today" (Brooks Hays and John E. Steely, *The Baptist Way of Life* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, 1964), p 27).

[92] Parushev, "Walking in the Dawn of the Light…," p 110.

[93] On baptistic vision creating a conventional moral space, see Hank Bakker, "Convictional Theology as Mapping Moral Space", *Baptistic Theologies,* Vol. 6, No 1 (Spring 2014), pp 81-97.

understand themselves in a different way, producing changes in what they believe and do. This is how the vision works – the Bible is read in a context, always anew, being continually reinterpreted and interpreting its readers. Theology in this case 'is not reduced to a kind of religious "identity politics,"'[94] rather, it is about discovery of what the community (and its members) believe through the examination of their practices (including the practices of reading their Sacred Story) and the world they live in. After such critical evaluation of these practices in the light of the biblical message, there is a call to something new, through challenging the old ways, through maintaining the vision, as a way into the future under the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In my next step I will turn to the important concept of practices, and, particularly, practices of reading and interpreting the Bible, with preaching as one of them.

[94] Freeman, "The 'Coming of Age' of Baptist Theology in Generation Twenty-Something," p 23.

CHAPTER 7. Practices: 'actualizing resources' of the vision[1]

Introduction

As I was following the argument of N. G. Wright, that understanding 'who I am' is a question that has to be answered prior to approaching the question 'how I should live,' Chapter 6 started with a query of what constitutes Baptist identity. I came to the conclusion that the major hallmarks of the baptistic movement and its core convictions, such as biblicism, missionary zeal, believers baptism, autonomy of the local church, separation of church and state, and others – are rooted in a particular theological hermeneutics. This hermeneutics is 'a bi-focal strategy in which the communities find themselves both part of the story and being examined by it: it is "that" eschatological moral vision of the NT communities which defines 'this' present moral life of a community (or a person in it). And it is the "then" of the future fulfilment of the Kingdom vision that verifies the "now" of everyday living,'[2] therefore, can be seen as an organising principle for the whole baptistic theology, providing a good explanation for their unity and diversity, thus being a mark of baptistic identity. Chapter 7 will offer a transition from the principle to practice, from the question of what constitutes a formative element of baptistic community to the question of how the baptistic vision is implemented.

Jesus' public ministry was started with him calling his first disciples. They were invited to leave their professions, their friends, and even families, in order to respond to the calling of the Messiah. Matthew (4:18-22) emphasises the immediacy with which Peter, Andrew, James and John responded to the call. Thus, for Matthew, 'discipleship implies the willing participation of each follower.'[3] The church, then,

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[1] I am borrowing the phrase from Brown's book *Transformational Preaching*. In the book, the phrase is used in reference to the rhetorical materials that a preacher brings 'into the sermon to construct the biblical truth [they] are proclaiming.' (p 403).This is a helpful way to define the subject for Chapter 7, as I am going to speak about those "tools" or "practices" that keep the baptisict vision alive.

[2] Parushev, "Walking in the Dawn of the Light…," p 34.

[3] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "The Practice of Community Formation," in Nancy C. Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg and Mark Thiessen Nation eds., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre* (Pennsylvania, Trinity Press International, 1997), p 90.

became an intentional community of faithful individuals, obedient to the teaching of Jesus and committed to one another, trying to reflect in their shared life the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, Christianity is, first of all, a way of life. The words of Jesus, 'I am the way and the truth and the life,' (John 16.4) are a constant reminder of this simple, and yet often, challenging truth. And whether Christians take this *Way* as something that follows salvation or constitutes salvation, does not change the important emphasis on a transformed life.

However, discipleship does not end with the transformation of one's life. Walking in Jesus' footsteps is not a lonely venture. On entering the Way, an individual does not step on some empty highway – many others are already there to share the joys and difficulties of the journey. Entering the Way is about becoming a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), becoming part of a new peoplehood (1 Peter 2:9) which requires active participation in the lives of other people. Yoder notices,

> The Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values, is a political reality. That is, the church has the character of a polis (the Greek word from which we get the adjective political), namely, a structured social body. It has its ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks.[4]

Accepting the concept of the body in relation to the church has profound consequences for its members, as it means 'the awareness that each member needs and serves each of the others, that the whole is more than all of the parts, and that the interdependence of all is structured according to an already given plan, flexible and able to grow, but neither chaotic nor infinitely negotiable.'[5]

McClendon defines the life of the Christian community by offering an image of three interwoven strands, which are 'embodied existence [body ethics]… communal structures [social ethics]… and the ongoing engagement of God in our individual and

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[4] John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville, Herald Press, 1992), p vii.

[5] Yoder, *Body Politics,* p ix.

social lives [eschatological vision].'[6] They are distinct but inseparable strands. He argues that 'the connecting link between the body ethics and social ethics… is to be found in the body of Christ that is the gathered church,'[7] because it is in a community of believers that Christians learn to live, to walk the Way, and are able to witness to the world.[8] Therefore, the existence of the Church with its rules, traditions, practices, and laws does at least partially answer the question of how Christian identity is passed – through the involvement in a community, and by participation in its practices.

Church practices receive their meaning from the biblical story. "This is that" part of the vision serves as a pattern that verifies the practices of the church, and makes it clear what the story is that Christians are part of. Nonetheless, despite its importance and clarity, this part (communal practices) cannot stand alone. Different themes or motives of the Story (which does not constitute the whole Story, but only part of it) being embodied in practices may fall or rebel.[9] This does not mean that the church will turn into some sort of anti-Christ, or into an enemy. However, it is a warning that a reductive view of the Bible, the inability of some churches to see its Sacred Story as a whole, is a kind of rebellion or failure by itself. Thus, the requirements are set for the eschatological part of the vision, "then is now," the part that focuses on the Risen Christ, who is the centre of Christian faith. However, without the biblical story, this Jesus turns into 'a mere mantra, possibly an idolatrous one.'[10] This sets the necessity for the practices of reading the Bible, since 'If we are to mean by "Jesus" the real Jesus [whom we can only know through the Scripture], we need sooner or later to answer the question he addressed to a sincere seeker: "How do you read the law?"'[11]

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[6] McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," p 86.

[7] Ibid., p 87.

[8] Ibid., p 88.

[9] Here I refer to the concept of *principalities and powers* as developed by John Howard Yoder in *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster,* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, originally published in 1972), p 146. I will further explore this subject later in this chapter.

[10] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 47.

[11] Ibid.

Let me then offer a brief summary of what follows. Chapter 7 will focus on the concept of practices, particularly as developed by Alistair McIntyre. The overall positive view of practices employed by McIntyre will be viewed in light of Yoder's concept of principalities and powers, with a conclusion that practices can be both positive, resulting in virtues, and negative, bringing out vices. This will bring me to McClendon's idea of powerful practices, and, subsequently, preaching as one of them. In Chapter 8, I will concentrate on the practices of reading the Bible in a community of believers, thus addressing the important question of how to minimize the damaging potential of preaching as one of the powerful practices of the Christian tradition.

7.1 Social practices

In the article on MacIntyre's method in Christian ethics, Nancy Murphy noted that his concept of practice 'is an especially illuminating contribution to understanding the Christian moral life,' as it may serve as a helpful inroad into the discussion on which practices are central for the sustaining of a Christian community.[12] Brad J. Kallenberg also points to the importance of practices suggesting that 'Christianity seems to consist primarily of the practice of community formation.' He also proposes the existence of several categories of subpractices that form clusters contributing to community formation: witness, worship, works of mercy, discernment, and discipleship.[13] Kallenberg argues that participation in these practices is essential for participation in the tradition called Christianity, as people are 'unable to grow in Christlikeness unless we participate in Christianity's practices.'[14] McClendon names Eucharist, the Covenant Meal, as a formative practice of the New Testament Church, 'At the fundament of missionary, Gentile Christianity, there is a rite, not magical or even (in many usual senses of the term) "sacramental" - but moral and ethical first of all; a rite aimed at the shaping of the common life of Christian community.'[15] Then he adds forgiveness as a skill required for

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[12] Nancey C. Murphy, "Using MacIntyre's Method in Christian Ethics," in Murphy, Kallenberg and Nation, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, p 31.

[13] Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," in Murphy, Kallenberg and Nation, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, p 22.

[14] Ibid.

[15] McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," p 92.

the continuous existence of the community of individuals from a variety of backgrounds.[16] All of the above points to the importance of the concept of "social practice" for a project dealing with a church practice[17] (preaching) that is attributed a leading role in shaping identity of a community. In the next step I will turn to MacIntyre's view on practices and their interconnectedness with virtues as well as the importance of authoritative narrative. MacIntyre defines practices as

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[18]

Following this definition, a football-game or medicine, or marriage are practices, while 'bricklaying is not' (notice that architecture is).[19] The difference between an activity and a practice (hitting a ball vs. playing football for example) is in its purposefulness, only when an action or 'a skill finds its point in connection with some practice.'[20] This makes the range of practices almost endless as 'arts, science, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept.'[21]

MacIntyre further explains the concept of practice with the example of a child learning to play chess. At the beginning, the child can participate in the game without having any interest or desire to play, being tempted only by a candy, a payment he is offered. However, a time may come when the child gets the point of the game and starts enjoying the process. This example brings in two important concepts: goods internal and goods external. As the child plays only for a candy, he or she 'has no

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[16] Ibid., p 102.

[17] I am defining 'preaching' as a practice in the last part of this Chapter.

[18] *After Virtue,* p 187.

[19] Ibid.

[20] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 173.

[21] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 188.

reason not to cheat and every reason to cheat, provided he or she can do so successfully.' This candy constitutes the good external for this child. In real life the good external of the chess game can be money, fame, prestige, etc.[22] However, the practice of playing chess also possesses good internal, which 'cannot be had in any way but by playing chess or some other game of that specific kind.' MacIntyre uses the term *internal* for two main reasons: (1) because they cannot be identified by means other than 'chess or some other game of that kind and by means of examples from such games'; (2) only experience gained through participation in the practice allows a person to understand and recognize this good.[23]

Acquired through participation in a practice, the good internal is a good that belongs to the whole community. Thus, formative nature of a practice is highlighted – participation in a practice produces a virtue, 'an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.'[24] In other words, a virtue is part of an individual/community identity – making a certain (in my case Christian) way of life possible.

The work of Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Old Wine in New Skins: The Role of Tradition in Communication, Knowledge, and Group Identity* might be seen as an alternative to MacIntyre's theory. Addressing the subject, Gracia emphasizes the importance of traditions for successful communication, and for passing on knowledge and group identity. He says,

> Tradition permeates our lives and helps explain much that otherwise would be mystifying. What is religion without tradition, for example?... [Is] it possible to understand the many moral precepts that govern our lives, most rules of etiquette by which we regulate social interactions, and a

[22] Charles L. Campbell argues that if 'external goods become the focus, the practice is actually harmed.' He then uses the example of how the practice of preaching was corrupted in his seminary when students of homiletics were competing for better grades (in preaching) and the financial benefits that came with it (*The Word Before the Powers: An Ethics of Preaching* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p 137).

[23] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 188.

[24] Ibid., p 191.

> good number of the desires we feel without reference to tradition? … Tradition serves to ground and preserve our identity by locating us within smaller communities with which we can identify, in which our voices can be heard, and whose perspectives we accept and share.[25]

Gracia argues that the tool through which identity is passed on is tradition, which should not be viewed as a set of beliefs or doctrines. Instead it should be regarded as a kind of action.[26] Furthermore, Gracia rejects the role of the written text in passing on of the group identity. He argues that a text cannot be a key to passing on the identity because it is subject to 'hermeneutical problems… – as a text we do not know that those who understand it understand the same thing by it.'[27] His answer to the question of what makes separate and different individuals into a particular social or religious group is 'tradition,' assuming that 'there is a core tradition that helps to tie them together into groups.'[28] His emphasis is on tradition*,* which is viewed as an 'action of transmitting something.' The act of passing on can take place only when there are people who receive and enact some content that is being transmitted via certain means.[29]

Thus, people become who they are only through tradition, a set of actions that are repeatedly enacted by the participants of the group. Gracia argues, 'Religious traditions are neither sets of doctrines expressed in linguistic formulas nor linguistic formulas, but sets of actions, forms of acting in which certain linguistic formulas are repeated in certain circumstances as part of the fellowship within a group.'[30] The consequences are threefold. Firstly, linguistic statements (particularly in relation to the religious groups) such as doctrinal statements, creeds, laws are important but 'have to

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[25] Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Old Wine in New Skins: The Role of Tradition in Communication, Knowledge, and Group Identity* (Milwaukee, Wis., Marquette University Press, 2003), pp 11-12.

[26] Ibid., pp 15-16.

[27] Ibid., p 18. This problem, however, was addressed by McClendon and Smith in their work *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism,* where they argued that convictional differences should not be seen as unbreakable walls, therefore it is possible for people to communicate, understand and even persuade one another. (McClendon and Smith, *Convictions,* pp 8-10).

[28] Gracia, *Old Wine in New Skins*, p 27.

[29] Ibid., pp 45, 46, 48.

[30] Ibid., pp 112-113.

be taken as residues of behaviour… actions that fit into a way of life.'[31] Secondly, as traditions are actions, they can only be judged on the basis of their compatibility (or incompatibility) with other traditions. Thus a person can be a member of a religious group only if their actions are compatible with those of other members of the group. Thirdly, it promotes tolerance, since it is impossible to 'draw sharp lines between the pure and the impure… on the basis of rigid linguistic formulas.'[32] Thus, Gracia concludes that religion is not a matter of linguistic formulations, and is not grounded in language, but first and foremost it is grounded in a way of life.[33] 'The relation between the members of a community of believers is not one of speakers; it is not a matter of conversation, but of communion, that is, of union in a common set of practices that tie them together.'[34]

The value of this approach for my project is in its ability to offer an insight into the crisis of identity that many post-Soviet baptistic churches have experienced.[35] The reduction of the identity to a particular way of life, passed on through actions, results in churches clinging to the visible expressions of their spirituality and identity. Such patterns of identity passing can successfully function with one condition – the church has to be forced into secluded existence, where its members could grow up, absorbing a particular way of life, which would be the only way known. Understanding tradition as a key element of passing on baptistic identity does not allow space for transformation and development, which became a requirement in a post-Soviet, post-oppressive realities of democracy and freedom. Those churches that attempt preservation of their life, of 'the way they've always done things' risk extinction or alienation from society. This, however, means their inability to fulfil their Christian calling – to witness. Therefore, another approach is needed, the one that would enable preservation of the identity, without necessarily rejecting the change and development.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p 119.

[33] Ibid., p 119; Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations § 241*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p 88.

[34] Gracia, *Old Wine in New Skins*, p 121.

[35] I develop the notion of the crisis of Christian identity in the post-Soviet Baptist churches in section 9.1 *Three sermons in a worship service*.

Stanley Hauerwas offers that missing element from Gracia's argument by adding narrative to the important element of tradition in passing on identity. He wrote,

> The church… cannot be limited to any one historical paradigm or contained by any one institutional form. Rather the very character of the stories of God requires a people who are willing to have their understanding of the story constantly challenged by what others have discovered in their attempt to live faithful to that tradition.[36]

This brings me to the importance of narrative, which is a second concept in MacIntyre's argumentation. Narrative provides context, which fills actions with meaning. For example, how to understand an utterance of three unclear words 'histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus' addressed to you by a stranger at the bus stop? MacIntyre says that the only way these words (and the whole situation) may become intelligible is if there is an explanation of an action, if you are given a context that clarifies the person's behaviour.[37] If you are given a chance to look into the life of a person, from a madman he may turn into a librarian who confused you with someone else, or a spy, pronouncing a password, etc.[38] This example points to the importance of narrative that fills actions with meaning. '[If] human actions are intelligible only with respect to stories that contextualize intentions, then that which unifies actions into sequences and sequences into a continuous whole is the story of one's life. My life as a whole makes sense when my story is told.'[39] MacIntyre argues

> I can only answer the question 'What am I to do? if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them

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[36] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ill., University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) p 93.

[37] MacIntyre argues that identification of a speech-act is not enough as 'speech acts and purposes too can be intelligible or unintelligible.' (*After Virtue,* p 210).

[38] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 210.

[39] Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," p 23.

> are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories… that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.[40]

For Christians, this story is the story they read and understand from the Bible,[41] - 'the individual's life story gets its *telos* from the role she or he plays in the church [the story of the church] and in God's greater purposes [God's story].'[42]

Such understanding of narrative helps to introduce a concept of tradition. MacIntyre views tradition as 'an historically extended socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition'.[43] Kallenberg identifies three components of the tradition. Firstly, tradition has history, or story. Every community 'has its continuity,' despite the fact that it always loses and receives new members. Therefore, every new member enters an ongoing history, becoming part of it. Secondly, tradition requires community as it 'has its inception in the formation of the community that is defined by those who have pledged corporate allegiance to the tradition's authoritative voice or text.'[44] As this authoritative text is

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[40] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 216.

[41] Cf. 'The church says to us, 'We're not giving you a story that you can choose. You don't get to make God; God gets to make you. You are made by being brought into this community through which you discover your story. And your story is that you have been created to praise and glorify God – all moral life derives from that truth. Therefore, there is a distinct difference between you and those who have not been made part of God's story.' (Stanley Hauerwas, "Christianity: It's an Adventure," in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001), p 524). Hauerwas extensively develops the ideas of interconnectedness and necessity of Christian narrative for the formation of Christian convictions in virtues in *A Community of Character,* pp 89-101.

[42] Murphy, "Using MacIntyre's Method…," p 43.

[43] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 222.

[44] Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," p 25. See also Alasdair Macintyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 1st edition (Notre Dame, Ill., University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), Chapter 18.

being read anew in every generation, traditions always penetrate time, being extended through several generations.[45]

To sum up the previous argument, it can be said that MacIntyre's perspective on virtues, practices, narrative and tradition may serve as a helpful tool for understanding how identity is passed on. In his article, Kallenberg presented a useful way of relating virtue, practice, tradition and narrative.[46] Christianity can be identified as a tradition that has its authoritative text – the Bible. Tradition requires a community to live out the practices that constitute the tradition. Participation in practices results in virtues,

> [which] are to be understood as those dispositions, which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.[47]

7.2 Christ and power

Before continuing to develop the notion of practices, it might be necessary to introduce another concept, that of power. Every time questions of identity or character formation are addressed, the issue of power must not be neglected. Thus, in the next step I would like to turn to the concept of *the powers and authorities* as presented in works of Yoder and Walter Wink.[48]

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[45] Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," pp 24-25.

[46] Ibid., p 29.

[47] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* p 219.

[48] For further development of the concept of Powers and Principalities, see Marva Dawn, "The Biblical Concept of the 'Principalities and Powers': John Yoder points to Jacques Ellul," in Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J, Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) pp 168-180; and her critique of Wink's reductionist view of the role of Christ in the defeat of the fallen powers, see Marva Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacle of God* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001), p 18.

For Yoder the concept of power does not hold immediately negative connotations, if anything, power is inseparable from the person of Christ. Referring to the passage in Paul's letter to Colossians 1:15-17,[49] Yoder argues that in Christ 'everything "systematizes," everything holds together. This "everything" that Christ maintains united is the world powers. It is the reign of order among creatures, order which in its original intention is a divine gift.'[50] So in the first place the *powers* were part of God's good creation and despite their fall they are still needed. Thus, he concludes that

> even in this fallen and rebellious state the working of the Powers is not simply something limitlessly evil. The Powers, despite their fallenness, continue to exercise an ordering function… The law (which according to Gal. 4:5 prevents us from attaining to filial maturity) is nevertheless righteous and good and we should obey it.[51]

Following Berkhof, Yoder concludes the overwhelming broadness of the concept of *powers*, since it includes religious, social, and political structures. Wink develops the scale of the concept by further arguing that *powers* are not 'some kind of invisible demonic beings flapping around in the sky, occasionally targeting some luckless mortal with their invisible payload of disease, lust, possession or death.'[52] Instead they need to be seen as

> the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power. As the inner aspects they are the spirituality of institutions, the "within" of corporate structures and systems, the inner essence of outer organizations of power. As the outer aspect they are political systems, appointed officials, the "chair" of an organization, laws – in short, all the tangible manifestations which power

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[49] Colossians 1:15-17: 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him were created all things, those in heaven and those on earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all was created through him and by him. And He is before all things, and all things subsist in Him.'

[50] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* pp 140-141.

[51] Ibid., p 141.

[52] Walter Wink, *Naming the Power: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984), p 4.

> takes. Every Power tends to have a visible pole, an outer form – be it a church, a nation, or economy – and an invisible pole, an inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates, and regulates its physical manifestation in the world. Neither pole is the cause of the other. Both come into existence together and cease to exist together.[53]

This complex and broad understanding of *powers* as created by God and thus necessary for the existence of human society, yet fallen to sin, therefore causing injustice and suffering instead of God planned wholeness,[54] and still not without hope of redemption and restoration through the ministry of Jesus is well summed up by Yoder:

> (a) [All these structures] can be conceived of in their general essence as parts of a good creation… *We cannot live without them.* These structures are not and never have been a mere sum total of the individuals composing them. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. And this "more" is an invisible Power, even though we may not be used to speaking of it in personal or angelic terms.
>
> (b) But these structures fail to serve us as they should… They harm and enslave us. *We cannot live with them.* Looking at the human situation from within, it is not possible to conceive how, once unconditionally subjected to these Powers, humankind can ever again become free.
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> (c) We are lost in the world, in its structures… But nonetheless it is in this world that we have been preserved, that we have been able to be who we are

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Charles L. Campbell argues that the main goal of the fallen powers is to survive at any cost. Thus, their God given purpose is being side-lined and rejected. 'Their [the powers'] fundamental concern is their own survival, and nothing must get in the way of that. Everything else is expendable: human beings, compassion, humanity, the land, preaching – everything. For the powers, finally, the only morality that matters is their own survival, and they will use any means necessary to ensure that survival.' (Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* p 25). Cf. William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, Word Books, 1973), pp 82-84. See also Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York, Doubleday, 1998), p 39.

> and thereby to await the redeeming work of God. Our lostness and our survival are inseparable, both dependent upon the Power.[55]

Yoder further develops the concept of the redeeming work of Christ in relation to the *powers*. He argues that in order to defeat the fallen *powers*, which 'cannot simply be destroyed or set aside or ignored,' Christ submitted to them, just like every human being has to. However, Jesus 'morally… broke their rules by refusing to support them in their self-glorification; and that is why they killed him.'[56] Thus, the cross becomes the natural outcome of Jesus' resistance to the demonic rule of the powers, highlighting the existing and ongoing struggle for Christians in choosing between preserving life (by siding with the powers) or losing it (by choosing the way of Jesus, thus risking to end up with Him on the cross).[57] Yoder identifies Jesus as someone who 'is not the slave of any power, of any law or custom, community or institution, value or theory. Not even to save his own life will he let himself be made a slave of these Powers.'[58] He then refers to Berkhof concluding that,

> By the cross (which must always, here as elsewhere, be seen as a unit with the resurrection) Christ abolished the slavery which, as a result of sin, lay over our existence as a menace and an accusation. On the cross He "disarmed" the Powers, "made a public example of them and thereby triumphed over them…"
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> The weapon from which they heretofore derived their strength is struck out of their hands. This weapon was the power of illusion, their ability to

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[55] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* p 143. Wink argued that the powers, being created by God, cannot exist separated from God's purposes, and are impotent to claim independence and autonomy from their Creator, 'Even in their apostasy and dereliction from their created vocation, the Powers are incapable of separating themselves from the principle of coherence. When subsystems idolatrously violate the harmony of the whole by elevating their own purposes to ultimacy, they are still no more able to achieve autonomy than a cancer can live apart from its host. Like a cancer, again, they are able to do evil only by means of the processes imbedded in them as a result of their good creation.' (Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), pp 66-67).

[56] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* pp 144-145.

[57] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* p 48.

[58] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* p 145.

> convince us that they were the divine regents of the world, ultimate certainty and ultimate direction, ultimate happiness and the ultimate duty for small, dependent humanity. Since Christ we know that this is illusion. We are called to a higher destiny: we have higher orders to follow and we stand under a greater protector.[59]

The triumph of Christ results in the formation of the Church, the transformed community of disciples that are called to represent Christ through their lives and preaching. The Church is called to offer a viable alternative of life lived under the guidance of the Spirit, liberated from the corrupt *powers* of the world.[60] 'The church must be a sample of the kind of humanity within which, for example, economic and racial differences are surmounted. Only then will it have anything to say to the society that surrounds it about how those differences must be dealt with.'[61]

The idea of the Church being a prophetic voice in a society, at the same time showing God's solution to the ills of the world, can be a good concluding point to a work on social ethics, Church and politics or any other field, where there is some kind of contraposition of the way of Christ, and any other way, leading in the opposite direction. However, when the subject of the research is the church herself and her practices, the idea of *powers* becomes ever more important. There is a danger of false dualism perceiving the Church as an agent dealing with matters of spirituality, thus being immune to the issues of *powers*, which are seen relevant to such areas as politics or economic.[62] Stassen makes an important observation regarding this problem of dualism as he addresses the question of Christ and Culture,

> The result is an extensive dualism, a compartmentalizing, in which we are blinded to the social dimensions of the spiritual realm and the spiritual forces in societal matters. Furthermore… Christ has tended to be relegated to the realm of inner spirituality, and culture is thought of as something social and

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[59] Ibid., pp 146-147.

[60] See also Douglas Harrink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, Brazos, 2003), pp 118-119.

[61] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus,* pp 150-151.

[62] Glen H. Stassen, "A New Vision," in Stassen, Yeager and Yoder, *Authentic Transformation*, p 214.

external. The result is a powerless Christ, and a blindness to how culture powerfully shapes the inner lives of persons and churches.[63]

Throughout history, there are many examples when the Church failed to fulfil its task of freeing persons 'for authentic struggle by replacing toxic ideas and images through the vision of a counter-reality capable of improving their lives.'[64] Churches were guilty of genocides, of apartheid, of promoting slavery – of embodying the evil structures that Christ came to defeat. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the church is to continue to identify the fallen *powers* and to engage them (not allowing any complacency), whether they are outside of the church or right at the centre of its convictions and practices, which is a revisionist theological task.[65]

This discussion of the concept of power once again brings out an important conclusion, whilst continuing to witness to the world about redemptive power of Christ, being His prophetic voice, the Church must be aware of the dangers of her practices and teaching turning into one of those self-glorifying *powers* that Christ defeated on the cross. In the next step I am going to turn to the concept of powerful practice, which combines McIntyre's concept of constructive practice that results in virtues with the notion of fallen *powers*.

Powerful practices

MacIntyre maintains a very positive view of practices – they are concerned with the goods internal, they result in virtues – in other words they produce good results. However, he leaves a cautious note: there is a difference between "practices" and "institutions." For him, institutions are concerned with external goods. 'They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards,' in order to sustain themselves and practices 'of which they are the bearers.'[66] Institutions are an evil, though a necessary one,

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[63] Stassen, "A New Vision," p 214.

[64] Ibid., 220.

[65] Ibid., p 220. Cf. Wink argues that 'the church's peculiar calling is to discern and engage both the structure and the spirituality of oppressive institutions.' (Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* p 84).

[66] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p 194.

because practices and institutions are locked into unbreakable union – one cannot exist without the other, and yet the goodness of the practice 'is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.' This is why virtues are important; they resist the 'corrupting power of institutions,' and 'enable evils to be overcome, the task to be accomplished, the journey to be completed.'[67] The integrity of a social practice fully depends on 'the way in which the virtues can be and are exercised in sustaining the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice.' [68]

This is the point where McClendon suggests a correction, arguing that in reality *institutions* are no different, and therefore, should be identified as *practices.* He wrote,

> the "institutions versus practices" distinction is not viable. Instead some practices, for example, hospital operation, *are* institutionalized; they are given by law or custom a formal status that fixes their place in the social structure. The *practice* of its operation, and not the building… is the hospital. *Thus even those principalities and powers that our society institutionalizes (its hospitals, schools, police departments, religious institutions) are rightly identified as (MacIntyrian) practices*.[69]

Therefore, the conclusion: every practice is a powerful practice that can either produce a virtue or a vice, because its connection to power is subject to perversion.

The term "powerful practice" originates from McClendon's understanding of the biblical concept of *principalities and powers*, which he reviews in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. He points to seven important elements that help us to discover the meaning of this term today. Beginning with the Old Testament, he shows (1) the inseparable connection between gods and nations (Egyptians and their gods, for example) in the worldview of the ancient people, thus linking gods with 'politics and society'; and moving toward (2) a theological struggle of ancient Israel: how to be the nation of the God called JHWH? Turning to the New Testament he points to (3) the powers viewed as 'God's creatures… [although] fallen and rebellious,' and therefore (4) the understanding of the

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[67] Ibid., pp 195, 175.

[68] Ibid., p 195.

[69] McClendon, *Ethics,* p 179. Italics of McClendon.

mission of Jesus Christ 'as conflict with and conquest of these (corrupted) powers.' These powers are referred to both in a 'proclamatory form,'[70] as well as in a form of a story (as in the Gospels), '[T]hey are the story, and the opponents are… the human overlords of state and temple… or they are the demonic forces that sponsor illness, madness, and temptation.'[71] Furthermore, the way Jesus conquers them is through 'the whole course of his obedient life, with its successive moments of proclamation, healing, instruction, the gathering of a redemptive community, and his costly submission to the way of the cross with its death and resurrection.'[72] (5) The established Christian church could continue applying the concept of *principalities and powers* not only to the external powers (the persecuting state), but also to the practices internal to Christian tradition – the practice of the Mosaic Law. This challenge of applying the concept of powers to Christian practices raises an important question – what relations do the practices of the Church have to the concept of principalities and powers? McClendon argues that these concepts are related. More than that, Christians continue living in the world where degenerated powers are dethroned but not destroyed. This reality therefore defines the missionary task of the followers of Christ (6) to witness that 'these civil, military, economic, traditional, cultural, social, yes, religious and other structures are not themselves the end and meaning of life,' thus bringing (7) hope of their full restoration according to God's plan.[73]

Christian life is embodied in practices that are infused with meaning by the biblical narrative and the community's experience of life. Participation in these practices of a Christian community can be described either in general terms (such as witness, worship, works of mercy, discernment, and discipleship[74]) or in a detailed enumeration (such as Baptism, Lord's Supper, Marriage, Preaching, etc.[75]) resulting in a changed character, a

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[70] Colossians 2:15: "There he disarmed the cosmic powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, leading them as captives in his triumphal procession."

[71] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 180.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., p 181.

[74] Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's After Virtue," p 22.

[75] Yoder's book *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World,* is an important work on the practices that are visible signs of the Newness that comes in Christ, which transforms the church and makes Christian witness to the world possible.

transformed life, a different identity. Such personal and communal transformation is the purpose for the existence of the church – to make disciples, to teach them Christ's way. (Matthew 28). Participation in these practices is 'goal directed,' and results in 'excellences of the practice itself and enhances its progress.'[76] Yet, a reminder that reveals the power possessed by these practices is equally important.

As *powers,* these practices have the potential to 'rebel, "fall," lash out at the reign of the Lamb, and persecute the saints.'[77] Therefore, the understanding of the church as a cluster of powerful practices should be a necessary and helpful point in the theological task of interpreting the realities of the church, not only understanding its strengths, but also seeing its weaknesses and challenges. Such recognition may help the church to avoid many slippery areas on the way of witness. As McClendon emphasises, 'Not every "church" is a front of Christian practice and faith, nor is every liturgy life-breathing, though it be called Lord's Supper[78] or Eucharist most holy.'[79] Therefore, the church must

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[76] McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," p 94.

[77] Ibid.

[78] An extensive analysis of the Lord's Supper as a powerful practice can be found in McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," pp 91-93. See also Yoder, *Body Politics*, pp 14-27; and Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* pp 51-53.

I can also relate my own experience of the Lord's Supper in Russian Baptist Churches. Traditionally, the passage from 1 Corinthians 11 is read. However, only verses 23-30 are normally used, with a heavy emphasis on confession of sins and personal purification prior to the participation in a meal, including a warning that people should not drink and eat in an unworthy fashion, which is understood as a lack of meditation about the body and blood of Christ, as well as presence of any unrepentant sin in a person's life.

Such reading and the emphasis on purification and meditation/thinking about Christ's sacrifice results in a very mystical understanding of the practice, which includes thinking or imagining scenes from Christ's sufferings (this might be a caricature however, the caricature does reflect the truth), long prayers of repentance (believers' prayers, not prayers of conversion) so that a person would not come to the Table with some sin (many people would spend a whole day before the Eucharist in fasting and prayer), and closed communion (as non-baptised people are not able to participate in a worthy fashion).

Although spending time in prayer and trying to have a pure heart is something good, the worrying and grieving element of such view of communion is a lack of recognition of the Body, which is the assembly of the believers. Therefore, the practice becomes very inward looking, devoted to spiritual world of individual Christians, appearing as yet another call to strengthen individual relationships with God through extra time of prayer and fasting. However, since

continuously re-evaluate and re-examine its practices, being open to 'have their understanding of the story constantly challenged by what others have discovered in their attempt to live faithful to that tradition,'[80] hence it is an invitation for people to practice the 'rule of Paul'[81] and a reminder for pastors to allow different voices, even critical ones to be heard and reviewed in a loving and caring community.

Preaching as a powerful practice

What is the place of preaching in this reflection on practices and power? First of all, preaching must be seen as a practice that helps to shape the life of a Christian community. In his extensive work on *powers* and *preaching* Campbell deals with questions of 'the significance of the practice of preaching for the church's ethic,' he asks 'how the practice of preaching informs the church's ethical reflection and moral life,' and he reflects that,

> The act of preaching plays a central role in the church's interpretive performance of Scripture. In this role, preaching embodies an essential, distinctive performance of the story of Jesus. Specifically, preaching enacts a concrete ethical performance of Jesus' third way – the way of active, nonviolent resistance to and engagement with the principalities and powers of the world. The preaching of the church re-enacts this ethical option at the heart of the story of Jesus.[82]

Then he develops the more complex reality that preaching and preachers find themselves in. Using the example of ethics of nonviolent resistance, he argues that it is nearly impossible for the practice of preaching to live up to that ethic. The pulpit itself often becomes the place of dominance and violent oppression.

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communion takes place only once a month even these extra prayers and fasting does not make much difference. At the same time, the Church has lost the power of communal transformation that the Eucharist may bring into the fellowship of believers.

[79] McClendon, "The Practice of Community Formation," 94.

[80] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character,* p 93.

[81] Yoder, *Body Politics*, Chapter 5.

[82] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* pp 79-80.

> … preachers have frequently used the pulpit as a way of dominating their congregations. The purpose of the sermon becomes that of winning a victory over the people in the pews. The preacher places himself or herself above the congregation and employs manipulation or threats in order to coerce people toward a certain position. Rather than helping to set people free from captivity to the powers of the Domination System, the preacher simply reinforces that system in the relationship between preacher and parishioner. And while there is no direct physical violence in such preaching, it is nevertheless preaching that occurs within a spirit of violent domination; it can involve psychological and spiritual violence and even verbal abuse. When other persons become simply instruments of the preacher's self-aggrandizement and control, the spirit of violence is at work.[83]

It might be helpful to add a clarifying note. While Campbell emphasises the potential dangers of how preaching can be used, he maintains a positive view of the practice itself. In his understanding, it is the practitioner (or their church or denomination) that is in danger of falling, thus turning preaching into a dangerous tool of violence and domination. This, however, differs from my argument that preaching, being a practice, has the ability to rebel and fall, by claiming its ultimate importance in the eyes of the practitioners (no matter how good the style or content of preaching can be), causing damage to the community of faith.

Preaching has intentional participants – preachers and listeners, and, of course, God.[84] Preaching has developed *standards of excellence*, which in Russian Baptist communities, first of all, would be deep spirituality of a preacher. In Russian Baptist churches preaching has identified goods internal – listening to the "word of God" produces faith, a virtue that enables individual Christians to follow the way of Christ. In

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[83] Ibid., p 84.

[84] According to Campbell, different stages in the history of the church can be characterised by different participants of the ministry of preaching taking its central stage, with the authority and personality of preacher dominating preaching in the second half of the 19th century, followed by God (or the Word of God) taking the central stage as a reaction to liberalism of the 19th century, finally at the present time, the congregation came into the focus of preaching with 'Congregation-centered preaching' becoming a 'characteristic of much contemporary homiletical thought.' (Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* p 68).

my analysis of the understanding of the "ministry of the Word" in Russian Baptist churches, I have arrived at the conclusion that preaching influences churches in more ways than it is traditionally expected (producing faith in listeners by providing them with Christian knowledge). The listeners do receive biblical knowledge and may be motivated through the message they hear. However, as it was shown in the previous discussion on the issues of authority and power in local churches (see Chapter 5), apart from the educational or/and inspirational dimension, preaching produces other results. Various contributing factors need to be considered:

1. The way preaching is understood: in the Russian context it is seen as almost exclusively a result of God's involvement with the preacher. Hence, a reverent and submissive attitude to both the preacher and his message is expected, and, to a certain degree, enforced through preaching and teaching of the church leaders.
2. Participants: is this ministry open to all members of the congregation? Can only baptised male members, approved by the pastor preach? Or is the ministry of the Word restricted for Ministers only?

In most cases, preaching is limited to several male members, selected and approved by the pastor and the church council. Such exclusiveness conveys an important message to the rest of the congregation: the task of biblical interpretation is the prerogative of people with special anointing from the Holy Spirit (with the Holy Spirit abiding predominantly in these selected or appointed leaders). Therefore, whilst the Bible is fairly widely read in Baptist circles, few people go beyond the surface, literal understanding of the Text, and the majority find it hard to apply the Message to their lives.

3. The way preachers are positioned in churches:

In Russian churches, preachers are not treated as ordinary members, accountable to the whole assembly. Instead, they form some sort of spiritual elite of a church, being "above" the rest. Often, they are literally positioned "above" the congregation, being provided a platform to sit on during worship services, with pulpits being elevated even further. In addition to such visible signs of "specialness," preachers (particularly those who form the leadership of local churches) and their families are treated differently, especially in the

way church discipline is applied to them in a far less strict fashion.[85] Furthermore, preachers are seen as "God's anointed," and thus, unable to err. Therefore, any criticism towards their personalities or ministry is seen as dangerous activity, which can bring retributions from God.

4. Finally, the way listeners are treated:

Unfortunately, the listeners are rarely encouraged to reflect and engage critically with the message from the pulpit and the biblical text used. Instead, they are told to listen and absorb the message unquestionably, as incontestable truth of God.

The heavy emphasis on preaching, as the central and the most important practice of the Baptist church in Russia, and its practitioners, as people with special anointing and authority, has resulted in pulpits becoming a power attribute, effectively alienating Christians from the involvement in individual in-depth Bible study, and creating two categories of church members – lay and clergy.[86] If the cornerstone of Baptist identity is understood in a form of a hermeneutical vision as suggested by McClendon, which implies the necessity for individual and congregational involvement with biblical text, which must become a guide for the life and practice of a community, then it is possible to speak of the destructive power of preaching, as a force that removes such in-depth engagement with the Bible from people's lives, leaving it in hands of a few carefully selected practitioners. The primary danger of preaching is that it can suppress communal reading of the Bible, substituting it with the "pastor's message" (no matter how good and polished it might be), thus separating the Story from the community of faith. Preaching may teach doctrines, but they remain as disjointed moral or religious utterances or even less so, slogans that people proclaim but rarely believe and follow. Hence, preaching becomes de-formative or even destructive for the baptistic identity as it removes the major mark, the core conviction that constitutes the identity of the group. Therefore, this raises an important question of safe-

[85] E.g. A. Popov, "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," pp 259-260.

[86] A. Popov notes that various publications in the *BV* were targeting different audiences. Devotional readings were considered as 'a normal activity of any converted Christian. This reading did not imply interpretation. Its goal consisted in the sustaining of a proper spiritual condition.' On the contrary, the term "Bible studies" was used in relation to publications and materials 'focused on professional ministers'. Thus, 'Bible studies were considered an activity of specialists or under the control of specialists.' ("The Evangelical Christians-Baptists…," p 258).

guarding – how can a church keep herself right, addressing her own weaknesses and imperfections, even in such central practice for her worship as preaching? This would be the subject of the next Chapter.

Conclusion

What then is the conclusion? Practices constitute the life of the church, and they possess formative powers, which help to preserve and transmit Christian identity. However, the practices have a potential to rebel against the reign of the Lamb through their tendency to claim ultimate importance in the eyes of its practitioners. Thus, every practice must be seen as a powerful practice with both formative and destructive potential, with ability to produce virtues, but also result in vices.

The concept of power becomes particularly challenging, since churches often see themselves as immune to such temptations. Yet such neglect may cause serious consequences, when various practices of the believing community turn into the fallen powers, which are in conflict with the Risen Christ. Preaching is one of those powerful practices – often perceived as the most important instrument informing disciples of Baptist churches. Nonetheless, the way the ministry of the Word is practiced frequently results in separating the listeners from the Sacred Story that it claims to bring to life.

In the next step, I will argue that preaching as one of the practices of reading the Bible in the community, must be exercised as part of a wider cluster of practices, which would serve as a safe-guarding against its potential destructive forces.

CHAPTER 8. Reading the Bible in community

Introduction

In Chapter 7 I arrived at the conclusion that, as a practice, preaching has the ability to fall, thus highlighting its destructive potential, which, unfortunately, is often neglected. This conclusion defines the next step of my work. I am going to address a question, "What kind of preaching is required in order to preserve and develop its constructive and formative power in Russian Baptist churches, whilst being aware of the possible damaging effects?" Since preaching cannot be separated from the Bible (which informs the message of a sermon), and a community, the sole receptor of the proclamation, the starting point has to be the question of communal hermeneutics – how the Bible is read in a community of believers.

In previous chapters, I have already touched upon the question of biblical interpretation. In Chapter 6 I addressed the concept of the b*aptistic vision*, understood as a hermeneutical principle, which defines Baptists' attitudes to the Bible as a book written for them, thus emphasising the significance of the biblical story as normative for the life of every Christian.[1] In the following pages, I will further explore the communal element of the process of biblical interpretation. I will argue that since Baptists address the Bible as authoritative Scripture for their lives, and not a mere piece of antique material for textual interpretation, their reading strategies may differ from those employed in academia. First of all, the Church reads biblical text seeking its literal and spiritual senses, using such approach as typological reading of the text. The existing safeguarding strategy against potential misinterpretations is reading the Scripture in a community of saints, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[2] The results of their interpretive activities must be projected onto their moral living, which provides necessary validation of the meaning of the text. In order to make such Scriptural reading possible, the church has to be a community of interpreters, allowing

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[1] McClendon, *Ethics*, p 29.

[2] On baptistic understanding of sainthood, see McClendon, Appendix: "Christian Worship and the Saints," in *Biography As Theology*, pp 172-184; and his "Do We Need Saints Today?" in Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright, eds., *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon Jr.*, vol. 2 (Waco, Tx., Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 285-294.

space for people with different levels of theological and biblical literacy to be involved at various levels of interpretation. Thus, it is necessary to identify a set of practices for reading the Bible, which serve as a platform of such communal interpretation.

Addressing a complicated and sometimes controversial question of biblical interpretation, I need to set some limits to this reflection on baptistic hermeneutics. I do recognise the existing diversity of convictions in various Baptist congregations in Russia (and around the world) regarding the Bible (including various views of inspiration), the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of interpretation, and authority in interpreting the sacred text that individual people within these churches may hold. However, I deliberately chose to ignore those differences. In addition, this chapter must not be seen as a prescriptive set of interpretive rules that should be imposed in Baptist churches. I am in no way implying that. In short, this chapter attempts to make a case for communal hermeneutics. I aim at offering a theological justification for my claim that reading the Bible in a community of faith (which includes the practice of preaching, existing within a wider cluster of practices of reading the Bible) serves as an important safeguarding strategy against destructive potential of the powerful practice of preaching.

8.1 The question of communal hermeneutics

McClendon's *Doctrine* begins with a question that defines the course for the whole volume – 'what must the church teach to be a church now?' What sets the direction and defines the shape of the (ethical) life of the church? McClendon says, 'Christian ethics grasps the live flesh of Christian existence; Christian doctrine traces its living skeleton, the bones within that flesh that give stability and coherence to its life. Without Christian life, the doctrine is dead; without Christian doctrine the life is formless.'[3] Since the church is teaching by what it does, as well as what it says, it is important to speak about the practice of doctrine. However, because every social practice possesses positive as well as destructive potential, there should be another practice, 'that resist perversion' of the potentially dangerous practice of doctrine.[4] McClendon argues that this is a practice of Bible reading. The Bible may hold different positions in the church, it may be read

[3] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 7.

[4] Ibid., pp 21, 29, 28-34.

carefully, seeking the explanation of every word, it may be placed on the book-shelf and forgotten, it might be praised and worshipped, used as a textbook by everyone or read only by the priest/pastor – whatever its role is, it impacts church communities. What makes the understanding of this practice important is that though it is 'vulnerable to perversion… [it] contains its own corrective.'[5] This self-corrective potential of the practice will be addressed in this section – how does the church read the Book, which holds both instructions for its life, and serves as a guardian against potential abuses caused by other practices?

In Russia there is a saying, 'Chitai kak napisano,' which means 'read as it is written.' This phrase implies that reading and understanding (of the Bible or any other book) is not something to make a fuss about. In other words, it is assumed that all one needs to understand the Book is to have eyes and be literate.[6] This view is shared by many lay members and ordained ministers in Russian Baptist churches (although apart from literacy, they might emphasise another important quality – the need for a person to belong to a church and have personal relationships with Jesus, as a necessary requirement for successful biblical interpretation[7]). Most likely, Russians are far from being unique in such an approach to the Scripture.[8] Discussing the subject of baptistic hermeneutics, Hatchett referred to this literalism, still present in baptistic communities all over the world,

> Baptists have not produced many theologians… They addressed pastoral problems in the contexts of believing churches who sought concrete

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[5] Ibid., p 35.

[6] Traditional Russian Baptist biblical interpretation, that has developed during the Soviet period, is based on two types of meaning of the text – literal and spiritual (which in turn is subdivided into two categories – metaphorical and prototypical (Old Testament events are understood to be prototypes of the events in the New Testament). (Karev, Mitskevich, V. Popov, *Ekzegetika*, pp 8-9). The main principle was that the Bible was its own best interpreter. I have addressed this in more detail in Chapter 4, section on *Biblical Exegesis in post-war communities.*

[7] This subject is developed in some detail in Chapter 3.

[8] Such view on the Bible could be traced throughout the history of the baptistic and protestant communities. See Ian Randall, who is addressing this issue quoting Archibald Alexander, the first leader of Princeton Seminary, who 'argued that in looking at biblical teaching it was necessary to be governed by 'the plain principles of common sense.'' (Ian Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), p 44).

> obedience to their living and present Lord. Yet we should marvel at the quality (and quantity) of their work, even though they naively read the text as an immediate expression of God's will and failed to account adequately for historical distance between themselves and the text.[9]

This quotation may be a good starting point, setting a stage for this exploration of baptistic hermeneutics – Baptists have done marvellous and extensive work in living according to God's Word, despite their naïve reading of the Text and failure to distant themselves and the biblical narrative. Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones in *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life,* ask a question of which interpretive method should be used by a faithful community. The need for answering this question has not ceased, regardless of all the efforts of numerous biblical scholars and interpreters. First they point to the fact that the 'problem with the quest for a method for determining the meaning of a text is that we cannot agree on what the meaning of a text would be… [We] are now heirs to dozens of theories about what the meaning of a text is and how it should be found.'[10]

Therefore, following the argument of Jeffery Stout, they suggest thinking in terms of 'interpretive interests,'[11] arguing that people have ability to rationally access the results of their interpretive attempts, which does not need to be called *the meaning* of the text, thus leaving the door open for interpretive options.[12] Hence, Christians need to acknowledge 'the plurality of interpretive interests' and do not treat 'alternative interpretations as failed attempts to discover the meaning of a text.' The way the Scripture was read in the past, including readings of Origen, Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, Luther and others, although it may disagree with our position, can help us see additional facets of meaning, which would bring extra clarity and depth into our understanding of the text.[13]

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[9] "The Hermeneutics of Conversion", p 37.

[10] Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p 15.

[11] Geoffrey Stout, "What is the Meaning of a Text?" in *New Literary History,* Vol. 14 (1982), pp 1-12.

[12] Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion*, p 15.

[13] Ibid., p 16.

Fowl and Jones make an important point saying that while we may discover that different people in the past did not limit themselves to a particular understanding of the text, it would be mistaken to view 'the history of Scriptural interpretation down to the Enlightenment as a period of interpretive anarchy.'[14] McClendon shares this view arguing that it is wrong to think that today people are much better Bible readers than were people in the past, hence we should not 'look back with pity, even consternation, upon the grim times before the white light of historical-critical exegesis began to shine.'[15]

So, in this chapter, I will address the way the Bible is read in baptistic communities, allowing them to stay faithful to the biblical message, even though they often neglect various modern hermeneutical theories and approaches to the Text. It has to be noted, however, that whereas I hope that this chapter will be of practical use for Baptist churches in Russia, I am not claiming that I will exhaust the large and important subject of biblical hermeneutics in Baptist communities in the few following pages. [16] Rather, this should be seen as an attempt to place the practice of preaching within a context of communal hermeneutics, consequently highlighting the existing unbalanced, and hence damaging to the witness of the Church approach to proclamation. My hope is that this chapter will contribute to the beginning of further research and discussion in the field of hermeneutics and preaching in Russia.

I would like to turn now to Puzynin's critical assessment of the interpretative paradigm currently promoted in the majority of baptistic churches in the post-Soviet area. Puzynin argues that throughout their history, baptistic communities in the Russian Empire and the USSR used

> the precritical mode of interpretation typical of the evangelicalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their reading of the Bible was

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[14] Ibid., p 26.

[15] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 35. See also James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "A New Way to Read the Bible," in Newson and Wright, *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.,* Vol. 2, pp 263-264.

[16] One may find further help in consulting the collection of essays in Helen Dare and Simon Woodman, eds., *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (Macon, Ga., Mercer University Press, 2011), e.g. those of Ian Birch, "Baptists and Biblical Interpretation: Reading the Bible with Christ," pp 153-171, and Parush R. Parushev, "Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics," pp. 172-190.

> characterised by Christocentrism, intratextuality, literal and figurative interpre-tation, interpretive pluralism, and the governing role of the Apostles' Creed.[17]

However, various Western missionaries and teachers who came to the post-Soviet countries after the fall of the iron curtain have rejected previously used methods as "unscientific," and instead have introduced both new theological approaches as well as methods of biblical interpretation through teaching in local churches, seminars for pastors, and various theological schools.[18] These methods were introduced as "scientific," and based on principles of "healthy hermeneutics," therefore able to bring much desired theological unity into the diverse baptistic ranks.[19] Puzynin indicates that such approach fails at various levels,

> First, it is not tradition-continuous and creates a significant disruption in the practice of biblical interpretation. It creates a chasm between traditional communities of faith and newly-created educational institutions… Second, it is not dialogical, because it is assumed that anyone who does not follow these 'obvious' and 'common-sense' rules is not practicing 'healthy interpretation.' Third, this approach does not solve the problem of interpretive pluralism. Despite its claims to scientific objectivity, the

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[17] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…", p 50.

[18] The subject of the contemporary state of Russian Baptist biblical interpretation and the existing discrepancies between modern approaches to interpretation prevailing in theological schools and more traditional views that are still predominantly held in churches is addressed by Olga A. Bokova in her article "Bibleiskaia Ekzegetika i Germenevtika Sovremennikh Evangelskikh Khristian – Baptistov: Traditsii i Novatsii" ["Biblical Exegetics and Hermeneutics of Contemporary Evangelical Christians-Baptists: Traditions and New Trends"], in *Vestnik Leningradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta im. A. S. Pushkina [Messenger of Leningrad State University],* Issue 2, Vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 2013), pp 216-226.

[19] According to Puzynin, the book written by V. Tkachuk (the former vice-president of the Ukrainian Union of Gospel Christians-Baptists), *Metody i Printsipy Tolkovania Sviashchennogo Pisania [Methods and Principles of Interpretation of the Holy Scripture]* (Lutsk, Ukraine, Centr Khristianskoi Zhizni Ukraini, 2000) is an example of such careless promotion of "western interpretive methods," whilst refusing to seriously engage with the indigenous approaches to biblical interpretation (Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," pp 39-40).

> approach has not been able to resolve theological differences among Eastern evangelicals, who are still divided over a number of issues… Fourth, the approach shifts the accent from communal participation in Bible reading and social praxis to an algorithmic, cognitive methodology. Fifth, it is not clear why the interpretive community should even read scripture, which contains raw and uninterpreted material, instead of just reading scholarly commentaries, produced by experts who practiced the same methodology, but with greater rigour. And finally, this approach can be used as a powerful tool for the ideological support of hierarchical structures... for absolutising their views on certain theological or practical issues.[20]

Instead of the above mentioned "scientific" approach to biblical interpretation, Puzynin develops a paradigm of differential-integral hermeneutics in his call to reconstruct traditional, context-based practices of biblical interpretation, which he sees as a requirement for future existence and development of the Evangelical Christians. He starts with A. K. M. Adam, who offers a thorough critique of hermeneutical methods that insist on existence of a single meaning of biblical text. Adam argued that instead of searching the meaning in the text, one has to turn to the readers, since meaning emerges as they work towards shared understanding.[21] Based on his claim that prior to the emergence of critical scholarship there existed plurality in interpretation, which nonetheless did not result in interpretive chaos, Adam notes that 'critical scholarship did not usher in the era of stable, scientifically certain interpretation.'[22] Thus, interpretive focus shifts 'from the discovery of the one and only correct meaning that subsists in a text to the interpreting human subjects and communities.'[23]

Despite the value of Adam's approach particularly in emphasising the value of an interpretative community, there are several deficiencies in his approach, which are highlighted by Kevin Vanhoozer,

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[20] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," pp 40-41.

[21] A. K. M. Adam, *Faithful Interpretation: Reading the Bible in a Postmodern Word* (Minneapolis, Minn., Fortress, 2006), p 5.

[22] Ibid., p 52.

[23] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 42.

> The core of Adam's argument is his apology of a prochoice hermeneutics and the concomitant proliferation of interpretation. What keeps proliferating hermeneutics from becoming profligate? The problem is not sheer plurality of interpretations – plurality is a sign of abundance – but the possibility of interpretations that misrepresent Jesus and, we might add, the possibility of interpretations that misrepresent God and the gospel.[24]

The key problem, which Adam's approach does not resolve is the necessity of safeguarding against intentional misinterpretation of the biblical narrative, as done by various sects. The second problem follows, which is an insistence on extreme subjectivity of interpretation, and its reliance on social structures,

> Interpretation is a necessarily subjective, value-laden activity. The text, while possibly existing as an objective set of data, cannot function in interpretation to authorise or rule out given readings apart from the set of interests and presuppositions that interpreters bring to their endeavours. The work of interpretation is not so much methodological as conventional.[25]

Vanhoozer sets himself to address the question of plurality of interpretation without turning interpretation into something infinite and arbitrary, 'how to affirm the fruitfulness and goodness of textual and interpretive polyphony without discrediting the integrity and specificity of the canonical witness to Jesus Christ.'[26] Thus, his approach becomes a corrective to Adam's subjectivity by insistence on studying the text in its historical context (including linguistic conventions and historically appropriated interpretations), whilst allowing the diversity of interpretive methods, which are context (and community) bound.[27] Still Vanhoozer's main emphasis remains on original authorial intent, since the Scripture is first of all the Word of God.[28]

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[24] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Four Theological Faces of Biblical Interpretation," in A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, eds., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2006), p 139.

[25] Adam, *Faithful Interpretation*, p 130.

[26] Vanhoozer, "Four Theological Faces of Biblical Interpretation," p 133.

[27] Ibid., p 141.

[28] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 44.

Puzynin identifies several limitations that come with Vanhoozer's method. First is the impossibility to have access to both biblical writers and their context, since 'all we have is the final form of a text that has been preserved in different manuscripts, canonized, and interpreted by the interpretive community of the church throughout its history,' which also creates serious challenges in defining original authorial intent.[29] The second problem comes from the understanding that readers cannot contribute to the meaning of the text, they only discover various shades of authorial intention. Vanhoozer wrote, 'The reader is not the begetter of meaning but rather a wet nurse who nurtures a discourse not of her own making. The text is a child of authorial discourse yet, precisely as begotten by authors, it can grow.'[30] Puzynin rightly points that such understanding does not leave space for various facets of meaning, which are 'creatively constructed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (or without it).'[31] Furthermore, Vanhoozer's approach does not resolve the problem of conflicting understandings of authorial intent, thus allowing it to remain arbitrary and subjective. And finally, one of the main weaknesses of this approach is that it leaves little to no part that a Christian community, a church, plays in the process of interpretation. Puzynin wrote,

> [Vanhoozer's] approach seems to assume, however, that Christian communities cannot interpret scripture correctly and wisely if they do not have trained scholars with the requisite skills and knowledge for the retrieval of original meanings.[32] However, it was demonstrated that the tradition of the Gospel Christians was developed even behind the Iron Curtain, on the assumption that God is the true author of the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible completed in 1876. Despite their lack of professional training, their

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[29] Ibid., 45.

[30] Vanhoozer, "Four Theological Faces of Biblical Interpretation," p 141.

[31] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 45.

[32] Puzynin's critique is reinforced by Fowl and Jones, who argued that despite the important contribution that biblical experts bring into the life of a church, 'they are not necessary for wise reading of Scripture. Rather, the interpretation of Scripture (which is different from interpreting the Bible) is a difficult task because it involves a lifelong process of learning to become a wise reader of Scripture, who is capable of embodying that reading in life.' (Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, "Scripture, Exegesis, and Discernment in Christian Ethics," in Murphy, Kallenberg and Nation, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, p 112).

> readings and literal/figurative interpretations had the power to nourish and transform lives in a totalitarian and hostile milieu.[33]

Thus Puzynin turns to Pol Vandevelde for an approach that could serve as a middle ground and compensate the shortcomings of Adam's and Vanhoozer's opposing methods. Vandevelde argues that the art of interpretation is not a dichotomy based on the necessary choice between monism and pluralism as conflicting interpretative methods. Instead, he develops a notion of purposeful interpretation which attributes an important role to an interpretive community, as well as a text since 'interpretive communities come to a text with their strategies of reading, and the text serves as an occasion for those strategies to play out.'[34] Vandevelde suggests that the chasm between monism and pluralism should be viewed not a-s a conflict, but rather 'two theoretical positions on two different aspects of interpretation.' Thus, he introduces the concepts of event and act, his way of defining the two distinct approaches, and bringing them together as different facets of one process of interpretation. He writes,

> By event I mean the fact that we as speakers and interpreters participate in a culture and a language that carry with them concepts, values, and habits of which we might not be aware, so that our interpretation is also something taking place in a tradition. By act, I mean an act of consciousness: someone interpreting a text makes a statement or an utterance and through his or her act is committed regarding the truth of what is said, his or her truthfulness, and the rightness or appropriateness of what is said, so that, if prompted, the interpreter must be ready to defend the interpretation made regarding these three claims.[35]

Vandevelde refers to three levels of meaning present in a process of interpretation with interpreters normally focusing either on all three (in such case the suggested levels represent 'an ascending order' in which interpretation happens). These levels are (1) the author's intention, (2) 'the meaning of the text, in the sense of what its words and

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[33] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 45.

[34] Pol Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter: Text, Meaning, and Negotiation* (Pittsburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), p 2.

[35] Ibid., pp 3-4.

sentences say,' or the literal meaning, and (3) the representative content of the text, which is 'the meaning that readers see.'[36] Developing this concept, Vandevelde argues that since understanding the text's literal meaning depends on the interpreter's 'mastery of language,' and authorial intent, although in most cases is made 'as clear as possible' still it cannot be unquestionably defined (due to the impossibility to fully recreate original context and meet the author), therefore all these categories of meaning have to be in continuous interaction.[37]

Such supposition brings an important conclusion, Vandevelde argues that it is the process of interpretation, rather than any of the above mentioned levels of meaning, which yields constancy to an interpretation. Both the interpreter and the receiving community are given significant roles in the process of discernment of the meaning. The interpreters must prove the truth of their 'interpretive claims' at every level of interpretation, as well as make a case for the correctness of their interpretation, and its relevance to 'the pragmatic situation that exists at the time' depending on the purpose of the interpretation – 'to reinforce such a situation or challenge it.'[38] Consequently, this establishes the need for the interpreter to be accountable to the community, which can accept or reject suggested meaning. Hence, interpreters must see themselves as part of 'the community of investigators,' both

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[36] Ibid., pp 8-9.

It might be helpful to bring in the understanding of the literal sense of the Scripture as developed by Hans W. Frei, who sees literal meaning as something that is defined by the consensus of the reading community, thus, should not be seen as something static, but dynamic, allowing transformation and development. Frei wrote, '… the literal meaning of the text is precisely that meaning which finds the greatest degree of agreement in the use of the text in the religious community. If there is agreement in that use, than take that to be the literal sense… So the first sense of the literal reading stems from the use of the text in the church.' (*Types of Christian Theology,* p 15).

[37] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* p 11. Cf. Campbell's argument that literal sense of the Bible is not 'a static, closed, rigid thing, but is rather embedded in the dynamic, dialogical life of the community of interpretation, which not only sets the boundaries of acceptable usage and interpretation, but also receives and incorporates new and creative readings in the consensus – a process that is evident in the Bible itself.' (Charles L. Campblell, *Preaching Jesus: The New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), p 89).

[38] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* p 104.

functioning as interdependent partners.[39] Therefore, sound Scriptural interpretation should encompass all the above mentioned levels of interpretation – it should attempt to address the author's intent in writing the text, provide a thorough analysis of the meaning of words and sentences, and present the representative content, thus enabling the readers to see their story reflected in the biblical narrative.

With this evaluation of the role of a community in interpretation, it might be helpful to turn to Fowl and Jones who, while arguing that it is impossible to discover a context-independent method for reading the Scripture, reject anarchy or subjectivism as an arbiter in understanding the Bible. The context in which the community of believers engaged in reading the Scripture finds itself, contributes to the way the Bible is read and interpreted. Besides, it is through reading in the community that the meaning can be discerned, and only when the communities embody in their lives their Scriptural interpretation:

> The aim of Scriptural interpretation is to shape our common life in the situations in which we find ourselves according to the characters, convictions, and practices related in Scripture. Because no one interpretive strategy can deliver the meaning of a text, there is no hard and fast method that will ensure faithful interpretation. No particular community of believers can be sure of what a faithful interpretation of Scripture will entail in any specific situation until it actually engages in the hard process of conversation, argument, discussion, prayer and practice.[40]

The need to live out the interpreted biblical text highlights an important notion of Christian attitude to the Bible, as containing a narrative, which is normative for their lives. That brings an extra dimension into the process of interpretation, which becomes more

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion,* pp 20 - 21. Similarly, Nancey C. Murphy argues that the church (or the community of the readers of the Bible) must be engaged with the world of the text, practice what the text suggests and appropriate feelings and attitudes that the text prompts, 'The New Testament churches were not perfect – they were struggling to become the Church. Insofar as we, too, are struggling to become the Church, we will be better able to hear what the texts are saying, and as a consequence better able to "perform the Scriptures."' (Nancey C. Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision," in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey C. Murphy, Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), p 267.

than mere textual interpretation, but interpretation of the Holy Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. According to Vandevelde

> as a text the Bible can be read in many different ways and with many different goals. Christians however, do not read the Bible just as a document, as nonbelievers do, but as a revelation… The meaning of words, which is carried by the letter and is thus a literal meaning, is determined by human convention. As such, the words (verba) constitute a "language of the flesh [carnis lingua]"... By contrast, the meaning of the things (res), carrying the divine intention, is the spiritual meaning. Accordingly, Christian biblical interpreters agree that, besides the literal meaning, there is a spiritual sense in the Bible that we can uncover by paying special attention to the text under the guidance of the Spirit.[41]

The pursuit of this spiritual sense, which according to McClendon is not 'an abandonment or discarding of the plain sense, but its appropriation into the whole story of divine and human relations'[42] is something what has been helping Christian communities across the world to grow deeper in their understanding of faith and enabling them to persevere in their faithful witness, regardless of the hostile outside environment. So, in spite of the progress and wider accessibility of the Christian theological education, the majority of the baptistic churches are being planted, living and growing under the lead (or even without any formal leadership) of people, who have had no formal theological training. The only training they receive is through reading and discussing the Bible in their communities, which did not expose them to any of the modern theories of biblical

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[41] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* p 127. See also Tod E. Bosinger, who argues that reading of the Scripture must be a self-involving and transformative practice, which goes beyond gaining information or knowledge, 'To read the Scripture as a performative document means that not only do we look through it to see that grace of Christ coming to and calling us, but we also listen to it as a divine narrative; a story that we are to act out. It is a story that involves us and insists that we enter it.' (*It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the community of God Transforms lives* (Brazos Press 2004), p 119).

[42] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 36. See also Curtis Freeman, "The Eclipse of Spiritual Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation from the Reformation to Modernity," in *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (Summer, 1993), pp 21-28.

interpretation.[43] And it is both literal meaning and a spiritual sense of the biblical text discovered within the community of believers that continues to inspire and motivate people to walk the Way of Christ. McClendon notes that despite multiple hermeneutical methods, various interpretive practices and approaches to reading the Scripture, the way the Bible was read has not changed drastically through history. As I have observed earlier, McClendon, following Frei, notes that

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[43] Fowl and Jones note, 'Long before the rise of critical scholarship Christians gave a rich variety of faithful readings and embodiments of Scripture without the benefit of source, form, or redaction criticism. They used the diversity within the canon to their advantage, reading various texts in the light of others.' ("Scripture, Exegesis, and Discernment in Christian Ethics," p 121). This however, does not diminish or reject the value of the developments in the field of biblical studies. Rather, it is an attempt to make a case for the need to develop various critical skills within a Christian community, enabling its members to discern wisely how the Scripture could be applied to their lives. Thus, instead of this approach being taken as an alternative to more scholarly views of the process of interpretation, it must be seen as another facet or a complex subject of biblical hermeneutics.

McClendon reconciles the discrepancy of the church vs. wider community (including non-Christians) methods of reading the Bible, by using the concept developed by Edgar McKnight of two classes of rules that govern the practice of biblical interpretation. The upper-level rules, which 'are coherent with widely shared convictions of the reading community' such as 'Christocentricity and universality of the gospel.' And the lower-lever rules, which are based on 'such matters as vocabulary, grammar, and historical-critical reading.' (McClendon, *Doctrine,* p 38; also Edgar McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-oriented Criticism* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1988); also *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985).

It would be appropriate to use N. T. Wright's illustration of the interconnectedness of the above mentioned views of interpretation. He wrote that biblical interpretation can be compared to playing the piano, 'Sit at a piano, hold down the loud pedal, strike a low note loudly, and listen. You will hear all kinds of higher notes, harmonics, shimmering above the note originally struck. In the same way, the retelling of the story that the Bible actually contains is to function as the striking of the low note, the basic fundamental note of God's story with his world. As we retell this story there will be harmonics audible, for those, at least, with ears to hear. The problem, of course, is that historical criticism of the Bible has insisted on striking the fundamental notes with the *soft* pedal on, as though by thus screening out the harmonics it might ensure that the fundamental really made its own point-and then Christians have grumbled that such criticism makes the Bible irrelevant. The equal and opposite danger is that pious Christians have only been interested in the harmonics themselves, and then by actually striking them instead of the fundamentals have produced a narrower range of tone, making up in shrillness what it lacks in historical depth and basic substance.' (N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" The Laing Lecture 1989, and the Griffith Thomas Lecture 1989. Originally published in *Vox Evangelica*, 21 (1991), pp 7-32).

> the main course of Christian Bible reading has held true over the centuries to the plain sense of Scripture – its stories were read as (in the main) real stories about real people; its history, real history, its declarations about God and God's creatures as saying what they meant and meaning what they said. The Bible was not a code or cipher to be cracked; it was not a book of secrets; it was realistic; it spoke plain.[44]

Obviously, this pattern of reading would be incomplete without the means by which the readers of the Bible moved from the literal sense to the spiritual sense.[45] McClendon argues that these means that serve as bridges binding spiritual and literal senses of the Scripture are the 'types' through which typological reading of the Bible works. Moreover, for the biblical writers, it was the primary way of reading the Holy Scripture.[46] However, this is not an argument in favour of the metaphorical reading of the Bible. On the contrary, McClendon leaves a word of precaution against literary

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[44] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 36. Cf. Stanley Fish makes a similar argument saying that communal interpretation serves as a safe-guarding against subjectivism in interpretation, and leads to the meaning of the text being rather determinate (Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1989), p 138).

Responding to the worry of subjectivism in communal interpretation, and thus, addressing the problem of the "hermeneutical circle," McClendon argues that this problem comes as modernity's 'yearning for foundational (and yet nontheological!) truth,' which presumably could have been resolved if 'we [Christians] periodically disown our Book, disclaim our intimate connection with it, and attempt to read it as though it were indeed something from an alien world. But apart from the historical detour to be reported next, the alienation was a false one.' Instead, he suggests that the problem of the 'hermeneutical circle' when speaking about the Bible, and the church reading it, is similar to the problem of the 'hermeneutical circle' 'belonging to the letters exchanged between a pair of lovers.' Thus, he argues that, in reality, the problem does not exist. (McClendon, *Doctrines*, p 39.).

[45] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 37.

[46] Ibid., p 37. Cf. George Lindbeck's argument that Scripture reading is 'Christ-centred, narrationally and typologically unified whole in conformity to a Trinitarian rule of faith.' (George Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus, and Community," in *This World 23* (1988), p 7). Also Hans W. Frei speaks about typological or figural reading as a main hermeneutical traditional approach employed by the church, in order to build connections between stories found in the Bible and realities of life. (*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1974), pp 2-3).

theories 'that discard this plain sense.'[47] Finally, such reading happens according to a number of rules. First is 'Christological: What Scripture ascribes to Jesus must not be denied by the reading of [other] Scripture.' The second is based upon the unity of the Bible, insisting that '"No Christian reading may deny either the unity of Old and New Testaments or the congruence… of that unity with the ascriptive literalism" asserted in' the first rule. The third rule allows readings which are not in contradiction with either rule one or two.[48] Bringing all these rules together and looking at them through the lens of the *baptist vision*, McClendon argues,

> The baptist vision is the way the Bible is read by those who (1) accept the plain sense of Scripture as its dominant sense and recognize their continuity with the story it tells, and who (2) acknowledge that finding the point of that story leads them to its application, and who also (3) see past and present and future linked by a "this is that" and "then is now" vision, a trope of mystical identity binding the story now to the story then, and the story then and now to God's future yet to come.[49]

The notion of discernment of the spiritual sense and the posture of the interpreters towards the text they use as containing a normative story for their lives raises the need of 'validation of meaning.'[50] This means that the end product of the process of interpretation, which is the meaning that answers/addresses relevant situations in which the interpretive community finds itself, the meaning that has power to reinforce such situations, or challenge them,[51] must be approved and accepted by the community. Thus, the whole process of interpretation shifts from being the task of the educated few, as assumed by Vanhoozer, and brought into the community of believers. The process of interpretation inevitably loses ground for

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[47] McClendon, *Doctrine*, p 37.

[48] Ibid., pp 37-38. Also Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition…," p 68.

[49] McClendon, *Doctrine*, 45.

[50] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," pp 49-50.

[51] Vandevelde, *the Task of the Interpreter,* p 104.

claims of scientific precision, being prone to diverse voices and opinions.[52] Puzynin notes,

> The process of validation is dialogical, openended, and provisional. The community will need to adjust its interpretations of scripture and of the external world in light of their contingent experiences, as well as of internal and cultural crises that require ongoing hermeneutical activity.[53]

Moreover, the ever changing cultural environment of the interpreters presupposes an indeterminate interpretation of Scripture, which has to continue changing in order to remain faithful.[54]

There are two important consequences of such an approach to the interpretation of Scripture. First is that it allows space for members of the community with various levels of knowledge and expertise to be involved in an ongoing process of interpreting their sacred Book. Thus, interpretation becomes inclusive rather than exclusive practice, where 'interpretation on the literal level may be more suitable for lay ministry, while the author's discourse analysis and the study of representational content would better fit the nascent academic culture in the tradition.'[55] Second, such an approach does not only allow communal participation, but rather requires a community to be present,[56] since its members serve as co-interpreters as well as practitioners, and therefore validators of the product of the interpretation. Fowl and Jones argue the case for the indispensable role of the community of disciples,

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[52] Fowl and Jones argue that 'interpretation of Scripture is open-ended and controversial activity.' ("Scripture, Exegesis, and Discernment in Christian Ethics," p 113.

[53] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 50.

[54] See Kathryn E. Tanner who argued that the church has to be engaged in the process of continuing biblical interpretation, which, therefore, inevitably leads to the plurality of interpretations. (Kathryn E. Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," in Garrett Green, eds., *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987), pp 59-78.

[55] Puzynin, "The Tradition of the Gospel Christians…," p 51.

[56] McClendon argues that 'without the community of its readers there can be no Bible reading at all. To read the Bible as Bible, God's holy book, requires membership in the biblical reading community – the people of God.' (McClendon, "A New Way to Read the Bible," pp 266-267).

> the interpretation of Scripture is indeterminate and requires the moral formation and transformation of people's lives because of the manifold ways in which people do not judge wisely. More precisely, our complicity in sin leaves us captive to destructive patterns of life. Such captivity undermines our ability to read Scripture well. Liberation from our captivity requires an ongoing process of being formed and transformed by God's grace in and through the friendships and practices of Christian communities.[57]

Thus the Bible, to remain the transforming and redemptive Word of God for the people of God, must be read within the community of disciples, who are actively engaged in both discernment of its meaning and living it out through their relationships, their day to day lives, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[58] In my next step, I would like to focus on the practical aspect of such communal reading - what does it mean to read the Bible in the community?

8.2 Practices of reading the Bible

Addressing the subject of communal hermeneutics, the first question that has to be answered is who are the participants of the process of Scriptural interpretation? According to McClendon there are only two – 'the narrator and the hearers,' with God, 'the giver of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,' being the Narrator. The hearers, therefore, must be all the readers of the Bible.[59] Such understanding allows the Bible to become the Holy Scripture, which contains narrative that is normative for our individual and communal living. Furthermore, since no one can claim the position of the Narrator, the reading of the Bible remains a truly communal exercise, that contains a solution to potential intentional and unintentional misinterpretations. The Bible turns into the Book that challenges the convictions of its readers, asks uncomfortable questions, and sets the course for the ongoing transformation of the believers. According to McClendon,

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[57] Fowl and Jones, "Scripture, Exegesis, and Discernment in Christian Ethics," p 114.

[58] Lesslie Newbigin speaks about the Holy Spirit as a starting point of the life of the Church. The Holy Spirit plays a primary role in Christians' discerning the will and the way of God. However, such spiritual discernment must be practiced within the family of faith, since the Holy Spirit 'gives to the Church the necessary gifts' of discernment. (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York, Friendship, 1954), p 106).

[59] McClendon, *Doctrines,* pp 40-41.

> Whenever it [the Bible] speaks, its story not only supports and conserves, but challenges, corrects, and sometimes flatly defeats the tales we tell ourselves about ourselves. God's Spirit who breathed upon the writers of Scripture breathes also on us, *sometimes harshly.* The consequence is that our stubborn wills are turned, our blind eyes opened, our arrhythmic hearts set beating in tempo. This is not always immediate and is never without ugly exceptions; but it happens often enough to confirm our faith in the Author of the Book.[60]

Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that such a view of the importance of reading the Scripture in the church does not presuppose that mere pronouncing of the words written on the pages of the Bible (which is the process of reading itself) triggers some magical sequence of events. Whilst this might seem like common sense, it should not be taken for granted that reading the Bible in the community takes place in every church. Far too often, church activities that are considered to constitute "reading of the Bible," such as preaching, instead contribute to its gradual removal from the church's everyday life and practice.

Addressing practical ways of how the Bible is brought into Russian Baptist communities, it is possible to identify two distinct ways. These are preaching and small group Bible study. In previous chapters, it has already been shown how the practice of preaching, which traditionally is seen as a primary tool for bringing the Scripture into the church, often yields opposing results. In Chapter 5, I have referred to Sipko's reflection on the damage that preachers' authority produces in Russian Baptist churches, 'usurping' the right of the Church to read and interpret biblical truth. In a similar way, small group Bible studies often limit the circle of the interpretive interests of its participants to the discovery of what a particular text means. Either by addressing some commentaries of the Bible or by asking a simple question – 'Is everything clear? Do you have questions?' Unfortunately, the frequent response to the first question is 'yes,' and the second is 'no,' with people assuming they understand the meaning, or being afraid to reveal their ignorance of wider biblical context, thus

[60] Ibid., pp 40-41, *italics* of McClendon.

choosing not to engage in discussion, making no further attempts to deepen their understanding of the text, nor to discover its practical application to their lives.[61]

However, when teaching (and discussion) does not go beyond ensuring superficial understanding of the meaning of words and sentences that constitute biblical narrative, the transformative power of biblical text is severely restricted, if not annulled. In addition, the use of the Russian Baptist 'traditional' approach to interpretation leads to the Bible being interpreted via numerous references to other biblical passages, at best helping people to memorise some bits of the Bible, whilst often leading to confusion and an inability to explain what a particular text means for the life of the church. Another problem is the intolerance that is often present in churches in relation to any interpretation, which differs from the developed traditional (which received its shape during the Soviet period) understanding of various Scriptural texts. The problem is that such hermeneutical conservatism not only rejects new ways and approaches to interpretation, but, which is more important, labels them as heretical and sinful,[62] thus making communal reading practically impossible.

I must take a pause at this stage to re-emphasise the point that I made at the very beginning of this dissertation. This work is neither an attack at "imperfect" interpretive strategies of Russian Baptists, nor a usual call to simply re-design their preaching style by introducing some more "sound" or more popular "western" alternatives. While I believe self-criticism is something important that Baptist Churches in Russia (and particularly its pastors) have to learn, it has to be said that there are no perfect preaching styles, just like there are no perfect churches. In a similar way, various significant weaknesses can be found in any approach to

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[61] This conclusion is based on my personal observation of multiple small group Bible studies, where I have participated growing up in a Baptist church in Voronezh (Russia), frequently working as an interpreter with a number of churches in Bryansk area (Russia), being involved with international church and working with students at IBTS, Prague (Czech Republic), leading a young adults Bible study group in a Baptist church in Edinburgh (UK), and currently serving as a pastor of a Baptist church in Bury, Greater Manchester (UK).

[62] For a critique of such traditional reading of biblical texts and churches' unwillingness to accept new approaches to interpretation, see Victoria Antonenko, "Principles for Interpreting Jesus, Parables and the Way They are Understood by Evangelical Christians in Russia," in *Theological Reflections*, Vol. 4, 2004.

preaching, whether traditional or modern. It might be helpful to refer to the work of Charles L. Campbell as an example.

In his analysis and critique of narrative preaching (particularly works of Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry and Charles Rice), Campbell points out various limitations of this popular contemporary approach. Recognising the positive impact that the narrative preaching approach made on contemporary American preaching, he also points to its serious short-comings. One of them is a heavy emphasis placed on the individual experience of listeners during the preaching event,[63] which, as he argues is the driving force behind this approach to preaching.[64] This leads to individualistic perception and retelling of the story through listeners' individual experiences,[65] which therefore becomes the main source of people's understanding and knowledge of God. The danger and limitations of such approach are first of all in a shift from the focus of preaching, as 'human experience becomes the focus of the sermon, rather than God in Jesus Christ, whose identity is rendered in the biblical narrative.'[66] Campbell argues that in its pursuit of 'relevance' for the listeners, preaching misses numerous important parts of the Christian story, which is omitted, if 'it cannot be evoked from experience.' Thus, Christianity is 'relegated to the private realm. The gospel becomes divorced from serious, radical, public claims and from a concrete, public community of faith.'[67]

However, Campbell falls into a similar trap. Although he recognises the limitations of preaching for shaping people, and indicates that there is a danger of corrupt practices of the community of faith to have the power to corrupt the practice of rhetoric, he still sees preaching as the main solution, the main instrument of resisting the fallen powers.[68] Thus, he attempts to offer a corrective to the narrative preaching approach,

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[63] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching,* 3rd ed. (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1979, originally published in 1969), p 57.

[64] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus,* p 123.

[65] John C. Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament: Proclamation and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1991), p 49.

[66] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus,* p 141.

[67] Ibid., p 142.

[68] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers,* pp 140-141.

by developing an alternative. I believe the main issue that is at stake here, is inadequacy of any approach to preaching *as the main or even the only way of introducing the Scripture* into the community of faith. No approach or style of preaching can address a variety of issues related to communal interpretation of the Bible, or the lack of it (and its projection onto the communal life), thus it can be easily criticised as reductionist. Hence, a clear understanding that preaching (regardless of its style) must be seen as one, often limited, facet in a complex subject of communal hermeneutics might be a reconciling solution, as well as a way forward.[69]

Addressing the subject of practices of reading the Bible in the community, I do not plan to perform an in-depth research on how small group Bible studies are organised and led in Russia. Nor is it my intention to analyse all possible dangers of preaching. Rather, such references to potential barriers on the way to making biblical interpretation a communal practice is an attempt to remind us that when a group of people is gathered around an open Bible, this does not mean that they are inevitably becoming the community of interpreters. Neither does listening to great amounts of preaching make the listeners into experienced readers and interpreters of the Word. Therefore, Baptist communities must make a conscious effort in transforming the focus of their engagement with the Scripture, from mere (and inevitably shallow) listening, whether through preaching or a small group Bible study, to deeply self-involving transformative *ongoing* communal experience.

Fowl and Jones develop a similar argument saying that the biblical text has to be read 'over-against ourselves' and not only 'for ourselves.' This means that rather than approaching the Bible with questions about its meaning, Christians have to allow the Scripture to talk to people, asking its own questions and raising concerns about their lives. They argue,

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[69] This subject is further developed by Brown, in *Transformational Preaching,* as he dedicates one of the chapters to the differences between teaching and preaching. He argues that preaching must be seen as 'a persuasive discourse,' a motivational ministry, which confronts the listeners with biblical truth. Teaching on the other hand, aims at providing 'understanding of biblical truth.' (*Transformational Preaching,* pp 31-44). Thus, both types of ministries are important, and both have their strengths and weaknesses, which must be recognised. Neither should be neglected or sacrificed for the sake of the other.

> Our ability or our failure to read Scripture over-against ourselves can have significant consequences for our day-to-day struggle to live faithfully before God. Nevertheless, no method guarantees that we will read Scripture in that way… First, we must be as willing to be interrogated by Scripture as we are to interrogate Scripture. Of course, since Scripture does not actually talk, Scripture's interrogatory power will come to any community through the voices of interpreters with well-formed character within the community and concerned outsiders.[70]

This argument of the necessity for Scripture to interrogate its readers underlines the creative, although challenging, task for contemporary Baptist communities. There is a need to develop their ranks of often complacent listeners into the communities of interpreters, whose voices will be able to provide the much needed challenge of the 'predispositions, ideologies, and theological presumptions' with which people approach the Bible.[71] Some will have to become biblical scholars, which, therefore implies the need for churches to work in close partnership with theological educational institutions. The process of 'developing people skilled in the application of critical biblical scholarship' defines the necessity of providing such opportunity for them by relieving these people from other duties. Therefore, this should serve as a reminder for the church communities of the need to take responsibility in identifying, educating, and then using their members for the ministry of biblical interpretation; for 'would-be scholars' – of their responsibility to serve their church families with humility and respect, regardless of their superior knowledge in comparison with others, and finally, for theological schools – about the need to cooperate with churches, responding to their needs and listening to their concerns.[72] I will consider the role of the theological schools in the development of the practice of preaching later in Chapter 9.

Although theological training does play a significant role in stimulating deeper engagement with the Bible in churches, I do not want to create an impression that the sole purpose of this reflection is to raise numbers of theology students in Bible schools

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[70] Fowl and Jones, "Scripture, Exegesis, and Discernment in Christian Ethics," p 124.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., pp 125-126.

and seminaries across Russia. The Holy Spirit gives churches different gifts, and not everyone is called to full-time ministry in the field of theology or biblical studies. However, this is not an excuse for the majority of churchgoers to pass their responsibility of becoming interpreters of the Word onto their pastors or other trained ministers. Rather, it is an invitation to start thinking creatively on how the Bible can be brought into the life of every Christian, how the narratives that we find in the Scripture can become life stories of the church members.

Such an objective, to develop a church into a community of interpreters, may seem a scary proposition for some pastors, since it involves taking a risk of losing control over various matters of congregational life.[73] Thus, what is required is something that Sharon Welch defines as ethics of risk, instead of ethics of control,[74] where 'ethical actions are not primarily those that control outcomes and successfully transform the world. Rather, ethical actions are those acts that make possible further resistance.'[75] Obviously, I am not comparing members of Russian Baptist churches to the oppressed groups that need liberation, which is the focus of Welch's work. However, the process of transforming the passive listeners into the community of interpreters requires a sequence of steps, which may bring unexpected results. In addition, it must be emphasised that regardless of the challenges posed by such an unpredictable and open-ended venture, stimulating individual and communal

[73] I can illustrate this by sharing a conversation that I had with a pastor of a large Baptist church in Russia few years ago. The conversation took place after their members meeting where the congregation had "appointed" the Church council (or the "Brothers council" as it is traditionally called in Russian Baptist churches). In that process, the church members were not even given an opportunity to nominate their candidates, instead for their affirmation they were presented with a list, drafted by the pastor himself and few of his closest colleagues from the existing "Brothers council" (most of the elders were re-elected at that voting). I asked why they did not trust the church in nominating and voting for potential candidates, thus making this election a truly communal experience guided by the Holy Spirit. The pastor honestly answered, 'If we do that, they [the members of the church] will certainly vote brother Victor and brother Alexander in, which we [the pastor and the existing members of the council] do not want.'

[74] Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethics of Risk* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990).

[75] Campbell develops a notion of ethics of risk in relation to the subject of integrity of preaching, which he presents as an instrument of bringing the message of peace and nonviolent action into the church. (*The Word Before the Powers,* pp 89-90).

engagement with the Scripture is a necessary work of allowing the Holy Spirit to play a greater role in the lives of the church members.

Studying the Bible in small groups, Bible classes, creating opportunities for lay members to be involved in preaching and teaching, various activities that both make people interested in reading the Scripture, as well as engaging them in sharing their insights on how the text speaks into their lives – the list of such practices can go on. However, since the focus of this study is not to prescribe a solution, but rather to stimulate further reflection, I am not going to offer an expanded list of steps or practices that every church has to introduce into its everyday life and ministry. This is a process that every congregation needs to go through depending on its context and resources. At this stage, it would suffice to say that there are no quick fixes or instant solutions, or fit-to-all strategies of turning a church into the community of biblical interpreters. However, the process of searching and trying various methods, of growing new Bible interpreters and learning from them, of discerning individual and communal gifts and listening to God's newly discovered voice is rewarding by itself, both for the whole congregation and its leader(s).[76]

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[76] The following story might serve as an example of the necessary 'creativity' in developing a congregation into a community of interpreters. Serving as a pastor in a small Baptist church in England, the question of bringing the Bible into the community has been central to my understanding of the church and its ministry. However, this meant a major change for a congregation that was more accustomed to the pastor holding a central role in teaching, preaching, and leading their worship.

Apart from trying to engage our members in small groups for regular Bible study, as an attempt to lead them towards fuller involvement in the ministry of the church, there was one seemingly insignificant thing, which produced unexpected results particularly in some of our younger people. This something was the removal of the pulpit from the preaching event. I started to preach being on the same level as the rest of the congregation (there was no other platform apart from the pulpit itself), and there was nothing between the preacher and the congregation (neither a pulpit, nor a lectern). To my great surprise, apart from a number of slightly dissatisfied older members, who still consider the pulpit as an important attribute of pastoral preaching, several young people shared with me that the absence of "the barrier" between the pastor and the congregation helped them to stop thinking that only special people (like a minister) could be involved in teaching the Bible. Thus, they felt they could participate in church ministry. They became involved in public reading of the Bible as part of the worship service (something they were not willing to do at first), in preparing and sharing "children sermons," and two of them have asked if they could also try preaching 'at some point.'

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on practices of reading the Bible in the community. I have argued that the interpretive strategy adopted by Baptists was based on their understanding of two senses of biblical text – its literal and spiritual senses. The understanding of literal meaning as dependent on changing realities of life of the community of interpretation and spiritual meaning (discovered by typological reading of the text) presupposes the need for the existence of the community of interpreters, who can both discover the meaning, but also offer its necessary validation by implementing it in their lives.

The need for the existence of such community (which serves as a safe-guarding strategy against potential destructive forces of its practices) leads to the necessary existence of a number of practices of reading the Bible in community. I have argued that Baptist churches must become intentional in developing their members into biblical interpreters. First of all, this emphasises the need for cooperation between churches and theological schools. However, the process of raising biblical interpreters must not end only with biblical scholars, graduated with qualifications in theology. Every member of the Christian community needs to be involved (which is a challenging, yet rewarding enterprise) in the process of communal hermeneutics. This leads me to the final stage of this work – looking at preaching as one of the practices of reading the Bible in the community.

This brings me to a final point of this work, the question 'Which preaching?" In the following Chapter I will argue that it is possible to draw a positive lesson from the formative years of the Russian Baptist movement, as well as its contemporary practice of multiple preaching. However, the future development of the practice of

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Thus, fairly small things might encourage people to be more involved in practices normally reserved for "experienced Christians" or even labelled as "pastors only." While allowing less trained or gifted people to participate in preaching and teaching might seem as damaging to the quality of worship service, it certainly results in these people's greater commitment to the church and to the way of Christ, but also produces a liberating effect on regular church members, sending a clear message that everyone has the right and responsibility to interpret the Scripture.

proclamation has to be seen within educational space. The University[77] must see its task not only in training future preachers and pastors, but also, and, which is equally important, needs to be engaged in a second order theological task, which is 'the discovery, understanding or interpretation, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.'[78] Such 'discovery and understanding of convictions,' raises the question of group identity, which is an important, and nonetheless neglected element of theological education. This once again highlights the aim of this research – to offer a critical tool that can be used by educational institutions in their reflection on the practice of proclamation in Russia and shaping their preaching curriculums.

[77] As I have stated earlier, in Chapter 9 the term "University" is used in a rather limited way – in relation to Christian academia, various educational institutions (seminaries, Christian Institutes, Bible schools, etc.) that are involved in ministerial formation, but also act as places of theological reflection.

[78] McClendon, *Ethics,* p 23.

CHAPTER 9. Preaching, Church, and University

Introduction

At the conclusion of a lengthy research on the subject of Baptist preaching in Russia, one may have the temptation to offer a ready-made solution (or at least an attempt) in the form of a preaching manual that could be shared among pastors and lay preachers, aiming at solving Russia's various preaching ills. Having listened to long and often uninspiring (which might even be an understatement!) sermons, having spoken with many different people about their impressions of preaching, and, having seen numerous problems that arise in churches as a result of failure of their "pulpit ministry," writing a denouncing pamphlet, claiming that the current practice has to be drastically reformed, may sound an attractive idea. However, I would like to focus on something good and precious that Russian Baptist churches have preserved, and which, with due critical reflection and modification, can become a starting point for a much needed transformation and renewal, not only of the practice of proclamation, but of the whole Russian Baptist movement.

What I am going to write next might surprise quite a few people. Moreover, some of the people that personally know me and my views on preaching would be stunned, just like I am amazed myself. The good and precious element of Russian Baptist preaching, which I see as a cornerstone for the future transformation of their preaching practices and reinforcement or, more often, rediscovery of their ecclesial identity, is a phenomenon of multiple preaching that is common in a Russian Baptist worship service.[1] However, let me say a word of self-justification, before I hear an astounding 'What on earth is he talking about?' from the western readers used to a one-hour service with a fairly short sermon, and my Russian sisters and brothers, who suffer (and I am not hesitant to use this rather strong word) week in and week out, enduring numerous lengthy contemplations on themes vastly removed not only from people's daily lives, but from anything real, during their 2-3 hour services. There are three important provisions that have to be taken into consideration before I proceed.

[1] See Chapter 5 for a description of contemporary Russian Baptist worship and preaching.

Firstly, it is the purpose of this work. As I have stated earlier, I am not planning to design a preaching method that could offer an adaptation of the best homiletical approaches developed in recent years in the Anglo-American Christian context to Russian ecclesial realities. Neither do I aim at developing and presenting my own unique homiletical method. Nor is this an attempt to argue a case for a revolution in various aspects of Russian Baptists' theology and worship practices. Rather, my aim was to offer a starting point for a critical reflection on one of the most important practices that has originally contributed significantly to the shaping of contemporary Russian Baptist churches and continues to influence them in various ways. Reviewing preaching *as one of the practices* of reading the Bible in a Christian community, as well as pointing to the constructive and destructive potentials of this practice, I hope to offer a tool that could be used for the furthering of homiletical and hermeneutical thought, first of all, in Russia's theological educational institutions.

Secondly, I am neither approaching the subject of preaching as a skill that lies in the fields of rhetoric and theory of communication, nor do I plan to address the question of which homiletical method should be used and promoted as the most effective and productive. These are important questions; however, not central to this research. I have focused on preaching as, first of all, a social practice. As a practice, preaching may yield diverse results, leading to the development of both virtues and vices. My argument is that to nullify its destructive potential, preaching must be understood and practiced within a wider cluster of practices of reading the Bible in the community. Thus, the following discussion will be focused on preaching as *a practice of communal hermeneutics*.

Thirdly, it is the important contribution that a concept of baptistic vision brings into the discussion. When the biblical story is understood as a normative narrative that forms both corporate life of the community of faith and individual lives of its members, the limiting factor of preaching is immediately brought into the focus. Even the best preaching strategy cannot lead people to appropriating *the whole of* the biblical story as their story. At best, preaching can help the listeners to adopt some behavioural patterns, learn a number of doctrines of the Church, and motivate or inspire them to act or think in a certain way. Therefore, what is required is a transformation of a congregation of listeners into a community of preachers/interpreters of the Word (this was my argument

in Chapter 8), since this is the only way to make a deep penetration of the biblical story into the lives of people possible.

Hence, in the following pages I will, first of all, address the phenomenon of multiple preaching. However, instead of attributing too much value to its current form, I will argue that Russian Baptist communities need to rediscover the roots of this practice, which was an excellent example of the whole community being involved in the process of discovery and application of the biblical story, of discerning people's spiritual gifts, and of bringing up their new leaders. I believe that there is a positive lesson that can be drawn from history, something, which can modify the future of preaching in Russian Baptist churches.

Finally, the concluding section of this chapter will raise a question of the future relevance of this research. A call to rediscover the communal aspect of biblical interpretation, thus significantly altering churches' take on preaching, may seem an impossible dream, considering the number of local congregations in Russia (over 1700), and their cultural and theological diversity. Therefore, first of all, I hope that this research would prompt further discussions, reflections, and research in the areas of Russian Baptist preaching and hermeneutics. This naturally leads me into the educational space – theological schools, as places of both ministerial formation, and also theological reflection on the practices and convictions of the communities of faith.

I will briefly address the controversial nature of the University/Church relationships in the Russian Baptist context, highlighting the fact that the lack of engagement between ecclesial and educational institutions can be explained through their inability to understand each other's tasks and methods. Further overview of the curriculums of two major theological schools operating in Russia, will reveal the lack of connections between various disciplines, such as Homiletics and Baptist identity. Furthermore, with the subject of Baptist identity being almost completely neglected, it raises an important question: to what extent does the current educational framework helps to enhance the understanding of the role and the place of preaching (one of the key ecclesial practices) in contemporary Russian Baptist communities (and, therefore, what is the role of educational institutions in moulding and shaping that identity)? I believe this would be a meaningful applicatory conclusion to this project.

9.1 Three sermons in a worship service: present, past and future

Contemporary Russian Baptist churches are facing numerous problems, which they are not always able to identify, willing to admit, and even less capable of addressing. Rising Christian nationalism (although an oxymoron in itself) among its members is just one of such issues. Recent catastrophic events in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine and the controversial "reunion" of Crimea with Russia sparked huge debates among the ordinary Christians of Russia and Ukraine.[2] Countless discussion threads on various social media websites (such as Facebook) almost inevitably concluded with mutual anathemas and abusive remarks regarding each participant's nationality and stance with God. The tragic absurdity of such a relationship between members of one ecclesial family (Baptists) reveals a significant underlying issue – people's inability to see that there must exist a Christian alternative to the current struggles of Russian and Ukrainian political elites. Unfortunately, at the present time, the way of Christ is perceived through the lens of ethnic and political identity, rather than its viable alternative. The Christian narrative has turned into a number of ethical add-ons, being overwhelmed and suppressed by another story, skilfully told through the state media as the only available option for Russian citizens. A century old manipulative slogan "to be Russian means to be Orthodox" returned onto the public stage in a different disguise – "to be Russian means to hate everyone and everything that disagrees with the State politics."[3]

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[2] The problem of growing nationalistic feelings has been a plague for the whole of Russian society, affecting representatives of various faiths and Christian denominations. However, for obvious reasons I focus exclusively on members of Baptist communities. Similarly, I believe identical problems can be found among Ukrainian Christians and the wider secular society. Yet, I choose to speak about Russian society because, being Russian, I feel it is more appropriate to focus on my own country, thus avoiding unnecessary debates about societies' degrees of guilt in escalating the conflict, and especially for propelling it into the ecclesial sphere. For reflections on the responses of Ukrainian evangelicals to the situation in Ukraine see Fyodor Raychynets and Parush R. Parushev, "Politically-apolitical Jesus: Reflections on the evangelical churches' response to crises in Ukraine," *Christian Ethics Today*, Vol 22:4 (Fall 2014, aggregated issue 95), pp 10-15.

[3] E.g. the term "Fifth column," historically referring to the "fifth column" of supporters in addition to 'four columns of troops' that helped Nationalist General Emilio Mola to defeat the Republican government in Madrid in 1936, and later, was used as a reference to the ethnic German Nazi sympathizers in the occupied territories during World War II, or 'the enemies of

Does preaching in churches make a difference? Apparently, not much: a lot of contemporary Baptist preaching can be described as a crusade against sinful living, which in Russian Baptist context means attacking certain social trends, like people's dwindling commitment to church, seen through their irregular attendance of worship services, as well as some obvious social ills like divorces, alcoholism, smoking, and others. A lot of such preaching comes with a warning of Jesus' imminent eschatological return and an inevitable threat of judgement and punishment for those who do not comply with the way, deemed right and, hence, propagated by the church and her leaders. To sum up, it can be said that most preaching either aims at imposing certain ethical restrictions on people's lives or simply cannot be described as any sort of meaningful activity, being a random collection of pious words, biblical quotations, and exhortations of a preacher.

V. Popov in his article on preaching in Russian Baptist churches uses a phrase 'the Crisis of the Genre' as a title to a section on the contemporary state of preaching. He argues that today's preaching can be characterised by the absence of 'God's fire that enflames souls,' instead offering 'dry lections on biblical themes or… remote from life's problems talks.'[4] While correctly noticing the crisis state of Russian Baptist preaching, surprisingly, he sees the roots of the problem in churches trying to imitate the 'western model' of having one sermon, preached exclusively by the pastor of the church, and other 'poorly planned experiments,' attempting to reform Russian Baptist worship, which lead to the disappearance of 'classical preaching' from a lot of churches.[5] V. Popov defines Russian Baptist 'classical preaching' as a tradition of communal preaching, when various members of a congregation are involved in this ministry together with the pastor. The roots of such practice are seen in a tradition of the Jewish synagogue that was absorbed by the New Testament church. V. Popov refers to the passage in Acts 13:15, which speaks about a synagogue ruler offering Paul and his companions an opportunity to preach

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the state' during the Soviet time, is now routinely used to label any dissent to the officially supported position of the Russian political establishment. (See E. V. Shabalina, "Chislitelniie v Russkoi Politicheskoi Frazeologii: Piataia Kolonna i Piataia Grafa" ["Numbers in Russian Political Phraseology: Fifth Column and Fifth Column"], in *Politicheskaia Lingvistika,* Vol. 1 (2011).

[4] V. Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…," p 44.

[5] Ibid.

an edifying message to the people.[6] Another passage, that offers support to such forms of preaching ministry, is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:26, which invites various people from the congregation to participate in the ministry of mutual edification.[7]

Whilst I disagree with the claim that attempted reforms or western influences have corrupted preaching in Russia, since such a claim lacks any backing or research behind it, and is based solely on the author's subjective opinion,[8] V. Popov's evaluation of communal preaching might serve as an important stepping stone for this section of my work. He writes

> Democratic approach to the ministry of the Word, rooted in the New Testament, and inherited by Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia from their predecessors,[9] brought significant creative diversity into the worship service, contributing to the emergence of the environment, encouraging the development of the gift of preaching, and brought missionary spirit into the whole congregation.[10]

Omitting the debatable issue of historical succession of the practice of communal preaching, I would like focus on the positive impact it produced in the first baptistic communities in Russia.

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[6] It might be worth noting that those pastors or seminary teachers from outside of the Russian Baptist context that have visited Russian Baptist churches would immediately remember similar invitations to preach. 'Would you like to bring greetings?' or 'Would you like to share a Word?' These are some of the standard "invitations" still widely used for visiting speakers.

[7] V. Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…," p 44.

[8] See Chapter 5 for an extensive evaluation of the contemporary Russian Baptist preaching.

[9] V. Popov argues that a number of nonconformist movements that appeared in Russia between 12-16th centuries should be seen as "spiritual predecessors" of Baptists. Strigolniks, Molokans, Starovers, Dukhobors and some others practiced similar open access to preaching. ("Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…," p 37). There were two criteria that a prospective preacher had to meet – to be educated, and have "pure soul." (E. A. Zamaleev, *Eretiki i Ortodoksi: Ocherki Drevnerusskoi Dukhovnosti [Heretics and Orthodox: Sketches of Ancient Russian Spirituality]* (Leningrad, Lenizdat, 1991), p 57). See also A. I. Klibanov, *Reformatsionniie Dvizheniia v Rossii v 14- Pervoi Polovine 16 v [Reformation Movements in Russia in 14th – first half of 16th Centuries]* (Moscow, Izdat. Academii Nauk USSR, 1960), possim.

[10] V. Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…, p 44.

Without repeating the descriptions of a Stundist worship or a gathering of Pashkovites (see Chapter 3 for an overview of Stundist worship and preaching), it might be worth providing a brief summary of what preaching meant for the first baptistic communities in Russia. First of all, preaching was seen to be a deeply communal exercise. Both male and female members of these communities were involved in this ministry.[11] The lack of ordained pastors defined the absence of established persons of authority in the sphere of biblical interpretation, thus allowing wider involvement of the listeners in the process of interpretation. Moreover the audience was not only allowed, but even *encouraged* to share their opinions (including disagreements) on the proclaimed text.[12] Furthermore, it was the congregational approval, rather than the pastor's sole opinion, that was seen as a necessary element of appointing people for preaching and evangelistic work.

A sense of pursuing something new, of re-discovering the unknown essence of Christian faith by reading the message of the Bible together with other Christians, learning to apply that newly found story to their individual and corporate living, resulted in a formation of a group with distinct ecclesial identity.[13] It is important to add that these people chose to drastically alter their lives in terms of morals and religious adherence, thus risking the state executed persecution for religious dissent, as well as social alienation, being labelled by the Orthodox clergy as bearers of the foreign faith.[14] Unlike preaching in contemporary Baptist churches in Russia, that simple communal study of the Bible produced a significant impact on the way people built their lives and perceived their identity in the turbulent years of social reforms of the second half of the 19th century.[15]

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[11] Margaritov, *Istoriia Russkikh Misticheskikh i Ratsionalisticheskikh Sect,* p 211.

[12] Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhno-Russkii Stundism,* p 251; see also Margaritov, *Istoriia Russkikh Misticheskikh i Ratsionalisticheskikh Sect,* p 166.

[13] See R. Ignashev's positive evaluation of Pashkov's simple proclamation of the biblical message, which although did not contain 'any theological intricacies,' influenced the way people perceived their lives and faith. (R. Ignashev, "Pashkovtsi-Baptisti v Peterburge" ["Pashkovites-Baptists in St. Petersburg"], in *Istoricheskii Vestnik [Messenger of History]* (St. Petersburg, 1909), p 185).

[14] Doronitsin, *Materiali Dlia Istorii,* pp 67-68.

[15] This fact is admitted by all their Orthodox opponents as a positive impact of these "sects." (e.g. Kushnev, *Nemetskiie Very,* p 11; Doronitsin, *Materiali Dlia Istorii*, pp 228-229). E.g. see

Of course, I am far from idealising either preaching of the early baptistic communities in Russia or any other aspect of their life and practice. Inevitably, there were various conflicts and struggles. Some of them were a direct result of the misuse of the Scripture.[16] However, the recognition that no practice is immune to a fall should serve as yet another reminder that the practice of preaching always has to be placed within a wider cluster of practices of reading the Bible, which includes the development of peoples' critical and analytical skills, by encouraging them to receive quality formal theological and secular education, as well as through the offering of informal educational opportunities through church-based Bible study groups.[17]

To sum up, it is possible to say that the beginning of the Russian Baptist movement was a successful experiment in communal hermeneutics. The practice of "multiple preaching" of primitive baptistic congregations led to the emergence of a clearly defined ecclesial identity, distinct from the dominant Orthodox culture, which eventually led to the appearance of such groups as Baptists and Evangelical Christians. The absence of rigid church doctrines, traditions, leadership, and worship practices allowed preaching to be a truly communal practice of discovery of biblical narrative and of turning that narrative into the life story of the church.

Jenniffer Hedda, *His Kingdom Come: Orthodox Pastorship and Social Activism in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, Ill., Northern Illinois Univercity Press, 2011, 2008), pp 46-47 and 88-89 and Ivana Noble, Tim Noble, Parush Parushev, and Kateřina Bauer with an Introduction by John Behr, *Wrestling with the Mind of the Fathers in (Post-) Modern Orthodox Theology* (Yonkers, N.Y., St Vladimir's Seminary Press (forthcoming 2015), Chapter five.

[16] It might be helpful to illustrate this point by referring to various conflicts that took place after the exile of Pashkov and Korff, among the Pashkovites in St. Petersburg. Princess Sofia Lieven noted that the lack of education of many 'brothers' of Baptist and Stundist origin that moved to St. Petersburg and joined Evangelical Christians led to various conflicts in the movement, due to their inability and unwillingness to go beyond certain doctrines (such as church membership and church discipline, the Lord's Supper, believer's baptism, and even questions of appropriate style of clothes) and have open discussion of the Biblical texts (*Dukhovnoie Probuzdeniie v Rossii,* pp 71-75).

[17] In his educational ministry, Prokhanov always emphasised the need to go beyond the idea of training ministers. His educational programmes included various subjects and events aimed at raising educational levels of the whole churches, not only their pastors. Thus, they offered various training seminars on theological as well as secular subjects (Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii,* p 148).

I have now briefly touched upon the troubled present of Russian Baptists and their preaching, and suggested the need to look into the past, the history of the movement in search of an inspiration for a potential revival. What about the future? Approaching preaching as a social practice, that must be exercised within a wider cluster of practices of reading the Bible, and calling churches onto a path of rediscovery of the value of the true openness of its pulpits, by bringing the ministry of the Word back into the community of believers, is too ambitious a call to expect an instant response. A wide range of complications, issues of authority and power, as well as now deeply engrained convictions of church communities and their individual members regarding certain ecclesial practices should not be discarded as insignificant issues.

Whilst a lot of inspiration can be drawn from the past history of the baptistic congregations in Russia, it can hardly be seen as a road map for implementing a full-scale experiment of transforming today's Baptist congregations, marked by rigidity of their theological convictions and ecclesial practices, into open-minded communities of biblical interpreters, thus solving various problems of abuses of power, and lack of relevance in sermons. At best, this thesis can serve as a starting point for a serious discussion on the nature of worship practices in Russian Baptist churches, and their role in giving shape to practices and convictions of the believers. Hence, the conclusion of this dissertation inevitably brings me into the educational space – theological schools, which must be serving as places of ministerial formation, but also as places of further theological reflection, thus enabling continuous growth and development in various areas of church ecclesial life.

9.2 Preaching in educational space

Church and University in paradox

The leadership of the Russian Baptist Union made various attempts to solve some of the problems of local churches that I have mentioned earlier in this work. First of all, they tried to achieve it by offering educational opportunities to pastors and preachers of local churches, when the change of political landscape (Perestroika, and the subsequent fall of the Communistic State) made it possible. The contemporary period in the history of theological education in Russia begins in 1989 with the opening of Odessa Theological Seminary. Following the collapse of the USSR, a number of Seminaries, Christian Institutes, Colleges and Bible Schools were opened in Russia,

Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. Mark Elliot notices that in 1990-1992, over 40 various educational programmes appeared in the countries that previously were part of the USSR. He points out that nowhere in history did protestant churches have so many programmes for full-time theological and ministerial training, as they did in post-Soviet countries.[18] The vast majority of these institutions were founded, funded, and operated by Christians from the USA.[19] Schools varied from large institutions (within the post-communist context) such as the MTSECB with their own campus, library facilities and extended faculty to small one-man organised and taught "seminaries," sometimes run at premises of local churches.

Konstantin Tetereviatnikov noted,

> The essence of the appropriated paradigm was as follows: the evangelical believer, who wanted to become an effective and qualified minister, was supposed to receive appropriate theological training with emphasis on biblical studies, hermeneutics, languages, systematic theology and applied disciplines, such as homiletics, pastoral ministry, evangelism, discipleship, etc.[20]

At first theological schools enjoyed great numbers of students, but most of their graduates did not find places in church ministries.[21] Similarly, churches did not express

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[18] M. Elliot, "Bogoslovskoie Obrazovaniie v Postkommunisticheskii Period: Polozhitelniie i Otritsatelniie storony Zapadnoi Pomoschi" ["Theological Education in Post-Communistic Period: Positive and Negative Sides of Western Help"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 1 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1996), pp 18-19.

[19] E.g. A story of the beginning of MTSECB and the role of US Christians in its formation can be found in A. P. Kosinko, "Stanovleniie Bogoslovskogo Obrazovaniia kak Osushchestvleniie Dukhovnikh Chaianii Evangelskogo Bratstva" ["Formation of Theological Education as Fulfillment of Dreams of Evangelical Brotherhood"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia,* Vol. 1 (Moscow, MTSECB, 1996), pp 9-13.

[20] Konstantin Tetereviatnikov, "Perspectivi Vospitaniia Sluzhitelei: Proshloie, Nastoiashcheie i Budushcheie" ["The Prospects of Forming Ministers: Past, Present, and Future"], in *Traditsiia Podgotovki Sluzhitelei V Bratstve Evangelskikh Khristian-Baptistov*, p 245.

[21] It has to be pointed out that there are various reasons for churches not receiving (or often not accepting) newly formed "theologians" after their graduation. Frequently, churches were not ready for them. The people that were allowed to go to study, were often the people that the churches (or their leaders) did not want to see in ministry anyway, they literally wanted to get rid of them. So, their return with qualifications for ministry only caused tensions. However,

real interest in supporting educational programmes or developing partnerships with schools. Even today many local churches still perceive theological education as something damaging to true spirituality, rather than a tool that can assist them in mission and ministry.

At present, theological education in Russia finds itself in an even more challenging environment. Financial support from foreign sponsors has dwindled. The number of applicants has significantly fallen, either due to the graduates unable to find employment in churches or other Christian organizations, or because secular universities with prospects of a more enriching career, are winning in a battle for prospective Christian students. As a result, a number of schools and educational programmes have closed. Others are trying to find ways of moving forward by experimenting with new programmes (e.g. online and distance learning courses), by asking questions about the kind of graduates they should be preparing, to respond to the needs of local churches, and by looking into the past, trying to develop "context sensitive" approaches to Christian learning.[22]

Thus, the gap between churches and educational institutions has not been bridged yet. I believe one of the key issues still has not been considered in the important on-going discussion about the future of theological education in Russia. Churches perceive the call to ministry, success in pastoral work, and fruitful preaching to be, first of all, a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. As I noted earlier, any shortcomings or failures are understood as the absence of God's Spirit, due to the wrong condition of the heart of

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amongst thousands of students that enrolled into various seminaries and colleges, there were many who saw their diploma as a possible step for a career, rather than as equipping for ministry. Many students were attracted by financial scholarships (which theological schools within Russia provided their students with), which sometimes were bigger than a salary they could earn in full-time employment. (See Ralph H. Alexander, "Assessment of Leadership in Post-Communist Europe," in *Consultation on Theological Education and Leadership in Post-Communist Europe (*Oradea Romania, 5 October 1994), pp 3-5; see also Elliot, "Bogoslovskoie Obrazovaniie v Postkommunisticheskii Period…," p 17-20).

[22] An article by Steve Patty, "Vzgliad Na Bogoslovskoie Obrazovaniie v Stranakh Tsentralnoi i Vostochnoi Evropi" ["The View of Theological Education in Countries of Central and Eastern Europe"] may serve as a good illustration of an attempt to explore contemporary trends in theological education and the churches' attitude to this area of Christian ministry (Accessed on 13.05.2015, from https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1yrBNryUjYOWAxnZEERUhur72iBujijL_lE-S8QJtD_w/pub).

either the preacher and his listeners, or both. Regardless of how educators relate to such an extreme "charismatic" approach, it is a starting point of most of Russian Baptist grass root theology and practice.[23] And, which is very important, this approach to ministry effectively excludes the need for education. It is not surprising therefore, that, as noted by Cherenkov, even today it is not unusual to hear the leaders of the Baptist Unions saying things like, 'We do not need theology, since it is already in the Bible.'[24] Nonetheless, contemporary theological education in Russia does not account for the existence of such a paradigm[25] or, even worse, dismisses it as senseless and irrelevant. In his reflection on the value of theological education Kornilov states,

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[23] Parushev, employing typologies of contemporary Christianity of Lesslie Newbigin and James Dunn, further develops the concept of the pneumotological stream of contemporary Christianity in his monograph *Christianity in Europe*. He writes, 'Alongside the two dominant flows of theological thought, there have always been streams of radical and truthful living of the Way of Christ in believing communities committed to the Kingdom vision. They are not much interested in "What is God like?" or "How does He operate?" In a child-like fashion they are witnessing God's immediate presence and acts in their lives, using, most of the time sub-consciously, the Socratic language of moral perfection and character formation (or discipleship). God is known by what He does in our midst. By constructing new ways of social living, they succeed in conveying, non-abrasively, the power of God to create the new in those and through those who are united to Christ (2 Cor. 5.17). They see themselves embodied in the narrative of the Kingdom of God revealed in and through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.' Without dismissing the value of Christian education, this insight should serve as a reminder of the existence of a viable alternative to the power of reason and theological debate, which was at the heart of the Protestant way of doing church. (Parush R Parushev, *Christianity in Europe: The way we are now* with a response by Vija Herefoss, Crowther Centre Monographs Series, Volume 9 (May 2009) (Oxford, Church Missionary Society, 2009), pp 18-19).

[24] Cherenkov's argument relates to the inability of the contemporary church leaders to see the value of quality theological education, which he perceives to be the root of the various problems of contemporary Baptist churches (Mykhailo Cherenkov, "Nash Baptism: Istoriia I Sovremennost" ["Our Baptism: History and Modern Era"], accessed on 12.12.2009, from http://cherenkoff.blogspot.com/2009/11/blog-post.html).

[25] G. A. Sergienko's article on effective preaching serves as an excellent example of the split between the "old paradigm" of preaching, that places a preacher's spirituality as a foundation for the successful proclamation of God's Word, which was cultivated over a period of several decades, and is present in every publication on preaching in the *BV*, and the "new approach," when effective preaching is, first of all, rooted in the knowledge of rhetoric, with questions of spirituality being side-lined for the sake of "professional" approach to hermeneutics, stylistic and lack of exegetical mistakes (G. A. Sergienko, "Put k Effektivnomu Propovedovaniyu" ["The way to effective preaching"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia*, Vol. 7 (Moscow, , 2001), pp 5-21).

> Our church, our whole brotherhood needs more educated and professional theologians. We have already understood that for ministry in our churches we need more educated ministers. Now we are beginning to think what kind of education we need… We need good, sound, classical theological education. Nobody will contest the fact that a Christian minister is not capable of performing the ministry of the Word, if he does not possess deep knowledge of what the Bible says about God… This knowledge consists of several aspects of theology, such as teaching about God, about Christ – Christology, about humans – biblical anthropology, about Church – ecclesiology. These and other aspects of theology, as well as biblical languages – are important components of education of a serious minister, a good builder of the body of Christ.
>
> To be a Christian minister and have no aspirations to develop your thinking and search for answers to everyday spiritual questions, to neglect theological education is almost the same, as when instead of good professional medical treatment people are offered charlatanry.[26]

The unfortunate reality of life for such educators, is that the majority of pastors still do not see a qualification in theology as a "must have" for a good minister. Nor do they like being compared to "charlatans." This leads to the situation where theological education is seen as damaging to the true spirituality of potential ministers, since it "develops" pride and the spirit of criticism. Another similar stance towards education sees seminaries as a threat to existing leaders, since any suggestion that a pastor/preacher needs to continue learning implies the questioning of their standing with God, their spiritual maturity, which establishes the foundation of their authority, perceived as God's special anointing.

Thus, it is, first of all, the lack of understanding of what constitutes the identity of Baptist churches, that forces the leadership of Baptist communities to hold on to the outer shell of their ecclesial practices, formed through the years of suffering and oppression under the communistic regime, and to reject anything, first of all

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[26] N. A. Kornilov, "Kakogo Roda Bogosloviie Nam Nuzhno?" ["What Kind of Theology Do We Need?"], in *Put Bogopoznaniia*, Vol. 6 (Moscow, MTSECB, 2000), p 10.

education, that threatens the cohesiveness of this fragile whole, that in their eyes constitutes the Baptist way of life.

Turning from the Church to the University,[27] there is a distinct sense of dissatisfaction and even quiet irritation in the Church's perceived inability or, perhaps, unwillingness to accept their "gift of knowledge and enlightenment." The Church is seen as a reactionary, extremely conservative social institution, 'interested in one-way traffic, receiving from education an intellectual image and concrete applied knowledge.'[28] At the same time, the University is understood (self-flatteringly, perhaps) to be a place of free thinking and constant pushing of the boundaries of accepted patterns of life and practice. Consequently, there is an assumption that the University's influence on the Church is seen as 'exclusively negative.'[29]

In addition to the lack of understanding mentioned above, educators often perceive their task as developing a theological tradition independent from the Church (although insisting that they do it as their service for the Church). Moreover, the University is seen as a place for 'non-Church theology.'[30] All of this contributes to the widening of the gap between ecclesial practice and academic thought. Thus, the appearance of Cherenkov's thesis, that the Church must be blamed for the existing misunderstandings and conflicts, can be seen as a result, naturally flowing from mutual misunderstanding and, eventually, mistrust. He writes,

> The alienation between the Church and the University continues not because the University is closed or has an antichristian disposition, but because the Church cannot and does not even try to express its faith in

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[27] As I have mentioned earlier, in this chapter the term "University" is used in a rather narrow sense of theological educational institutions. In such use of these terms I am following Mykhailo N. Cherenkov and his article, "Post-Soviet Protestants between the Church and the University," in *Theological Reflections,* Special edition: Bible, Theology, Church (2013), pp 23-30.

[28] Ibid., p 27.

[29] Ibid., pp 26-29.

[30] Ibid., p 25.

forms suitable for the University and to put its faith to an intellectual test in discussions.[31]

While lamenting the failure of the Church to reach the level of the University, Cherenkov seems to be interested in developing abstract academic theology.[32] However, in doing so, he misses an important part of the theological task – to discover the convictions of the community of faith, thus enabling an informed dialogue that can lead to further transformation of both dialogue partners, instead of perceiving the University as an alternative to the Church, which is seen as reactionary, conservative, and overtly anti-intellectual.

Hence, it is possible to speak of the inevitability of conflict between the Church and the University in the Russian baptistic movement. Each side is acting with their best intentions, and yet is unable to see their inherent and mutually exclusive differences, grounded in dissimilar understandings of spirituality, authority, identity, and purpose.

The discipline of homiletics

There are numerous issues that have to be considered in a discussion about the birth, development and future potential of theological education in Russia and other post-Soviet countries.[33] This dissertation does not attempt to resolve or even to identify them all. However, in my study of preaching in Russian Baptist communities, and the ways the current practice of proclamation affects churches through its connection to power, thus modifying the communal nature of Baptist congregations, the question of the future of theological education in Russia becomes, first of all, a question of developing a particular ecclesial identity, understood not in terms of creedal statements, but in terms of the existence of a binding narrative, that can embrace the diversity of baptistic communities, allowing churches (both leaders and lay members) to regain a renewed sense of purpose and unity. Too often the question of identity has been taken for granted, both by the Church, with the majority of its

[31] Ibid., p 28.

[32] Ibid., p 30.

[33] E.g. A recent work, which deals with issues of theological education in Ukraine by Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope* (Eugene, Oregon, Wipf & Stock, 2014).

members being unable to answer, what makes them Baptists, or what brings them to their congregations; and seminaries, which, whilst perceiving their task as the formation of Christian and Baptist identity and character, nonetheless, do not ask themselves, what constitutes the identity they were trying to form.[34]

At this stage, it might be helpful to offer a brief overview of the way preaching is taught in two major centres of theological education in Russia. First is Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which is the main educational institution of RUECB. The second is TCM-International Institute (Austria). Whilst the school is not Russian based, I have decided to refer to their preaching programme, since the institute has a major impact on Russian Christian culture through its Russian based educational centres in Vladimir, Omsk, Khabarovsk, and a number of centres in other former Soviet countries. Both schools act as important centres of ministerial training, with their M-level studies being an indication of advanced theological research and reflection.[35]

A quick overview of the two courses shows many similarities in the objectives and materials used. TCMII describes their course on homiletics[36] as 'a study of the principles of preaching as they relate to rationale, context, content, structure, style, and the delivery of sermons.' The rationale of the course is to 'help students better communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of their culture,' which is achieved

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[34] Sharp through his analysis of the nature of the formation of Baptist identity and Christian character argues that in order for theological education to regain its focus and relevance in Baptist life, they need to give up the ideas of primacy of individualistic spiritual formation and rediscover the value of communal discipleship through participation in a life of a Christian community, since this allows the formation of Christian convictions. ("Kto Takiie Baptisty Segodnia?" pp 105-106, 123).

[35] For further information on the history, programmes, and student bodies of these institutions see their websites: www.mbs.ru and www.tcmi.org.

[36] In this overview, I am referring to one of the two courses on preaching offered by TCM-International Institute. The second course deals with a more specific subject - 'The study and practice of doctrinal preaching.' Whilst this course is classed as 'Advanced homiletics,' and is different from their course on general homiletics, its emphasis is not on enhanced understanding or analysis of the practice of preaching, but on its one specific form - doctrinal sermon. (Leonid Mikhovich, "PT 622 Advanced Homiletics," Unpublished course syllabus (TCM – International Institute, 2014), available through the author.

through the analysis of 'the principles of preaching.'[37] There are several objectives for the course. These are, (1) 'Recognize the absolute necessity of maintaining the character of Christ in order to be heard as God's messenger… (2) Appreciate the role of preaching in Scripture and in the total scope of ministry… (3) Understand and apply the biblical/theological material concerning preaching.'[38] The following topics are covered in the progression of studies: the importance of preaching, textual interpretation, structure of sermon, relevance in preaching, how to preach (delivery of sermons), spirituality and intellectual development of preachers, expository preaching, and advanced planning of preaching ministry. The following books are required (all of them are available in the Russian language): James Braga, *How to Prepare Bible Messages;* John R. W. Stott*, I Believe in Preaching;* Haddon Robinson*, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages;* C. H. Spurgeon*, Lectures to My Students;* D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, Preaching and Preachers;* Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*; Leonid Mikhovich*, Kak razbit' skaly? [How to Crash the Rock?].*[39]

The course of MTSECB is described as a 'foundational course on the theory and practice of preaching,' which follows the course of New Testament exegesis. The rationale of the course is 'to lay theoretical foundations and develop practical skills for developing and delivering a sermon.'[40] There are several objectives of the course. The students are expected to (1) learn main homiletical concepts, (2) develop a skill of textual interpretation through studies in exegesis, theology and homiletics; (3) develop skills in formulating a theme of a sermon and developing a sermon outline; (4) enhance their rhetorical skills; (5) develop a better understanding of working with an audience. The course covers three major areas of preaching ministry: preachers' spirituality and calling; the role and the use of biblical text in preaching; and practical steps related to developing and delivering of a sermon. The key study materials are Haddon Robinson*, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository*

[37] Leonid Mikhovich, "PT 520 Homiletics," Unpublished course syllabus (TCM – International Institute*,* 2014), available through the author.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] G. A. Sergienko, "Homiletics," Unpublished course syllabus (MTSECB, 2013), available through the author.

Messages and John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some Classic New Testament Word Studies.*[41]

There are three important conclusions to be made from this overview. Firstly, the way preaching is perceived. Both curriculums aim at preparing preachers, who would be able to continue practicing preaching in its traditional way (as a rhetorical instrument that can help to achieve certain goals, whether educational or motivational). No attempt is made to explore the nature of the practice or analyse the existing assumptions regarding the value of preaching, as the central practice of Russian Baptist worship. Secondly, the conclusion relates to the type of materials used in the process of education. The lists of required literature almost exclusively rely on books written by Anglo-American authors. Whilst this is not a suggestion that the use of these sources might be inappropriate or mistaken (all the quoted sources are great examples of the development of homiletical thought, and are rightfully recommended for educational use), it must be recognized that Russian Baptist churches have developed and continue to exist in a specific cultural context (predominantly Russian Orthodox), which inevitably affects Baptist perception and practice of preaching, as well as other spheres of their theology and practice. There are no provisions for such specifics either through studying Russian Orthodox preaching, theology of the Orthodox Church, or through an in-depth study of Russian culture. Finally, the question of Baptist identity, although often raised in recent publications of various baptistic theologians, who work in the field of Russian (or wider post-Soviet) baptistic history and ecclesiology,[42] is neglected, being only briefly addressed as part of "the History of the Baptist Movement" discipline.

Theological schools always perceived preaching as a tool, an instrument to achieve certain goals, whether educational or motivational. However, as was shown in Chapters

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[41] Ibid

[42] I have already mentioned Kuznetsova's PhD dissertation "Early Russian Evangelicals (1974-1929): Historical Background and Hermeneutical Tendencies Based on I. V. Kargel's Written Heritage"; Puzynin's book *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*: *A Study of Their Identity and Theology During the Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods*; A. Popov's PhD dissertation "The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as Hermeneutical Community: Examining the Identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) Through the Way the Bible Was Used in its Publications"; Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V Kargel (1849-1937)*.

6 and 7, preaching has to be seen as more than a tool. From the example of Russian baptistic history, it is clear that proclamation has developed and evolved together with the Church. Various pressures that the Church had to cope with affected its preaching. Yet *the way* preaching was practiced produced far greater and lasting results in churches. One such change is the shift in the understanding of who can, and should be, the interpreter of the Word. At the beginning of the baptistic movement in Russia, entire congregations were involved in the process of spiritual discernment regarding both the meaning of the biblical text, and the appointment of their leaders. Gradually, the pastor became the only person who had the power to make such decisions. The preaching office was something that attributed this power. Therefore, to approach preaching as a mere rhetorical exercise is to miss something very significant for both preachers-in-training and the receiving churches.

From conflict to partnership: the way to mutual understanding

Let me offer a brief summary of the argument of this section of my work. An overview of the contemporary relationships between the Church and the University, the communities of faith and their educational institutions shows the inevitability of conflict. The existing inability to understand the mutually exclusive cornerstones of their ministries – the supernatural work of God in the Church, over against the academic reasoning, research and critical analysis in the University, results in a clash of paradigms, sometimes leading to a mistaken conclusion that free thinking of the University is rejected by the irrational and conservative Church.

The review of two courses on homiletics, which are offered by two major theological educational institutions, shows that the way preaching is taught further widens the divide between churches and theological schools. While seminaries teach their students the art of homiletics, which is inseparable from thorough exegesis, and the use of rhetorical devices, churches see these students as people with potentially distorted spirituality, lacking reliance on the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the existing link between pastoral authority and preaching office, which is grounded in personal piety and spirituality, effectively excludes a notion of learning to preach in academic settings.

As it stands, the current trend in relationships between baptistic churches and theological schools in Russia (and other post-Soviet countries) does not leave much

hope for the future. Their partnership is never equal. Currently, educational institutions fully depend on the support of local churches, which goes beyond mere financial contributions, but includes churches providing students and helping graduates with employment. As mentioned earlier, the alleged spirit of free thinking and pushing of the boundaries does not meet much sympathy with the rather conservative ecclesial culture of Russian Baptist churches. Hence, the existing seminaries, Bible schools and institutes are forced to adapt to the requirements and demands of the church life or cease to exist.

Nonetheless, despite the present tensions in the relationships between ecclesial and academic institutions, I would like to conclude this project with a positive outlook. I have previously argued that the lack of understanding of mutually self-excluding views on the role of the Holy Spirit and individual learning must be seen as one of the main reasons for the Church/University contradictions. Such misunderstanding can be best illustrated through uncomfortable situations that young students of theology often end up in, when they return to their local churches, having participated in a few courses on theological disciplines, thus discovering an "alternative reality" to the world of a local church. Passionate, unwilling to compromise their newly obtained knowledge, they spark fiery debates with "uneducated" pastors or preachers, trying to enlighten and correct them.

So, how can such conflicts be avoided? Can they be dropped in favour of a more pragmatic and mutually respectful position, where the University would not need to give up the free spirit of enquiry, whilst the Church would find it easier to involve people from other, less "charismatic" backgrounds? As I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, as well as through the whole of the dissertation, my aim is not to offer a modified curriculum that could potentially resolve existing weaknesses and fill in the gaps in the way the subject of preaching is approached. I do hope that my research might lead to something like it. At this stage, I would like to suggest only two possible corrections, or better to say, additions to the existing curriculums.

Firstly, the subject of Baptist identity needs to be seen as an important starting point for any studies related to the preparation of ministers/preachers. Whilst the whole notion of "identity" is not only a neglected subject for Russian Baptist theological

education, but also a rather alien concept for a wider society,[43] it should neither be ignored nor taken for granted. Unless this subject is taken seriously in educational institutions, all attempts to aid churches in dealing with their problems will be similar to trying to relieve symptoms of the disease without addressing the cause.[44]

The second element relates to the way the question of theology is approached. As McClendon argues,

> Theology is not just "ideas (or words) about God"; it is not a set of changeless beliefs associated with religion; it is not, despite the jokes, erudite discussion of inaccessible nonentities… There is a more satisfying notion of what theology is that makes sense to many people: on the one hand, "it represents something deeply self-involving for its adherents"; on the other, even mystical theologies… "are attempts systematically to connect mystical experience with what is and is not there in the world – or beyond it."[45]

Such understanding, unlike the previously mentioned idea of the University being a place of non-Church, pure academic theology, leads to a different relationship between the Church, a convictional community, and the University, an educational institution, which is involved in 'systematic study that investigates, interprets, and sometimes re-forms' convictions of a convictional community.[46] This approach presupposes that the University needs the Church, which becomes its community of reference, since theology is never neutral, but contextual and self-involving in its

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[43] As I pointed out earlier in the Introduction, ft. 16, at present, the Russian language does not have an appropriate equivalent to the term "identity."

[44] In his analysis of the historical identity of Evangelical Christians, Andrey Puzynin argues that these churches have undergone a 'series of epistemic crises' as a result of the changes in their identity being a 'direct result of the changing configurations of geopolitical forces.' Therefore, he sees a solution to the on-going 'crisis of the evangelical traditions' in 'a critical re-evaluation of the previous historical constructions of identity and theological practices, in light of the Logos, textually mediated by the canon.' (Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* pp 276-277).

[45] McClendon, *Witness,* p 398.

[46] Ibid.

character.[47] This systematic research and study of the convictions of the Church, understanding and discovery of what the Church really believes in, and how these beliefs were formed, will lead to a greater level of understanding and, subsequently, to greater appreciation of what the Church and the University practice and aspire to achieve.

This entire dissertation could be seen as an attempt to implement these suggestions into the study of the practice of proclamation. The answer to the question of the role of preaching in forming, preserving and passing on the ecclesial identity of Russian Baptist communities can only be found, when preaching is placed within the cultural, historical, and theological contexts of baptistic communities in Russia. This research has revealed that, although preaching is generally perceived as a tool for inspirational or educational use in local churches, it has a far more complex nature in shaping various areas of church life and practice. My hope is that this work will contribute to further development of how preaching is taught and practiced in Russia's educational institutions and, subsequently, in local Baptist communities.

Conclusion

Let me draw a conclusion now. Although the purpose of this dissertation was not meant to be a development of a new homiletical method, the concluding chapter presented some practical comments and suggestions, related to the future development of this practice in Russian Baptist churches.

The argument of Chapter 8 was that preaching, being a powerful practice, requires a community of interpreters, as well as a cluster of practices of reading the Bible within the community, in order to nullify its destructive potential. Therefore, I have suggested that it might be possible to draw some positive lessons from the formative period of the Russian baptistic movement, when preaching was seen as a communal practice, requiring its participants to actively participate in the process of biblical interpretation. Such communal involvement in the discovery of biblical narrative, and its application to the lives of individual Christians and the whole congregations, resulted in a formation of clearly defined ecclesial identity, despite the resistance of various oppressive forces that were present in the culture. Thus, in light of today's crisis of identity that can be

[47] McClendon, *Ethics,* pp 35-36.

observed in local churches, such reference to the practice, still present (the phenomenon of multiple preaching) and, moreover, occupying the central part of the church life, may lead to a rediscovery of the communal nature of biblical interpretation, thus restoring the lost critical edge for people's perception of the sermons, and the subsequent growth of quality preaching (both in its style and content).

Whilst hoping that the current study might be of immediate assistance for local churches, its focus, first of all, must be seen in the theological educational institutions. However, when addressing the nature and place of contemporary theological education in Russia, it is impossible not to address the existing tensions in the relationship between the Church and the University.

The leadership of the Baptist Union in the post-Soviet era made numerous attempts to develop preaching (and other ministries) in churches by offering educational opportunities and supporting the appearance of countless educational institutions all around Russia. However, very often these attempts were downplayed by pastors in local churches. Such promotion of education was seen as a threat to their position (since good preaching was always perceived a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, the need to change anything/continue learning for a pastor, implied that he was not close enough to God). As a result, people that were not needed or wanted in churches were sent to preaching schools and seminaries. Their preaching, when they returned, was neither accepted nor approved by pastors, nor by congregations (in most cases the pastor's opinion was the main criteria for such acceptance), causing conflicts and frustration, both in local churches and educational institutions.

However, apart from the seemingly reactionary stance taken by the local churches, the approach to teaching preaching (and other theological disciplines), employed by the University, has also contributed to the Church vs. University divide. Lacking clear understanding (or, perhaps, neglecting it) of the views on character formation and preparation for ministry, dominant in churches, theological schools attempted to teach preaching by developing students' hermeneutical and rhetorical skills.

I have argued that to bridge the seemingly inevitable conflict between the Church and the University, it is necessary to begin ministerial training with a course on Baptist identity, which would enable students to have better understanding of the ecclesial tradition they are coming from or hoping to serve. This brings me to the

second important element of theological education - the need to understand the theological task as discovery, interpretation, and potential correction of the convictions of convictional community. Such understanding, first of all, highlights the self-involving character of theological enquiry. It also underlines the important role of the church, as a community of reference, thus leading students to a greater appreciation of the existing convictions and practices of the Church, and therefore, enables them to see the continuity between their studies and the ministries of local communities of faith.

CONCLUSION

I have belonged to a Baptist church since my early years. Both of my parents were baptised in their youth and have always been actively involved in the various ministries of a local church in the city of Voronezh and, later, in missionary work in the Voronezh, Tambov, and Lipetsk areas in Russia. Hence, it is not surprising that the church features prominently in a lot of my childhood memories. I have to say, however, that preaching has never ranked highly among these memories. On the contrary, sermons were something I would rather have avoided. Nonetheless, just like every ordinary Russian Baptist, I ended up listening to (or, at least being present at the delivery of) a great deal of preaching: three or four sermons in every service (four services per week), with their number going up to six or seven on special occasions, such as Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday. One of the questions I could never find an answer to was 'why preaching?' What was the value of people listening to sermons, and, in particular, to so many sermons? The traditionally accepted answer, that 'preaching was the Word of God,' could not satisfy me, as I could not believe God's Word could have been so boring, unclear, and, often, rather meaningless.[1]

To a certain degree, this thesis is an attempt to answer that question from my childhood. The thesis examines the practice of proclamation in Russian Baptist communities, and the question of Baptist identity. The aim of the dissertation is to develop a critical analytical tool, which could be used by, first of all, educational institutions in Russia, but also the local churches, involved in the reflection and development of various church practices, and particularly, the practice of preaching. In my research, I have primarily focused on preaching as a social practice in a MacIntyrean sense. The content of preaching is mostly omitted, which is intentional, as, I believe, it deserves another dedicated study, which I hope may grow out of this research.

Despite the prominent place that preaching holds in Russian Baptist life, there is almost nothing written on this subject. Apart from a few publications in the *Bratskii Vestnik*, which aim at helping its readers to start preaching (or improve their preaching skills), I have found only two brief articles, attempting to study the practice of

[1] Please, note that this is neither a criticism of Russian preaching, nor my current position on the role of preaching in the church. This paragraph refers to some of my childhood memories.

proclamation in Russia. However, one of these articles deals specifically with the question of preparation of preachers,[2] and the other one lacks any academic depth, thus possessing little (if any) value.[3] Therefore, the new contribution offered in this thesis is that it is the very first attempt to analyse the practice of preaching in Russian Baptist communities, various historical, cultural and theological influences that have contributed to the shaping of this practice, and its connection to the formation of Russian Baptist identity.

The first five chapters of the thesis are an inquiry into the question of Russian Baptist ecclesial identity, with preaching playing an important role in the forming and passing on of this identity. Most of the material in these chapters is a historical overview, which identifies various internal and external factors that have significantly influenced the development of Russian Baptist communities and their worship practices. I am employing the theological method of James McClendon, who argued that the material that theology works with is convictions, expressed in a particular way of life. Thus, I focus on the history (or biography) of Russian Baptist communities, in order to identify those convictions that are at the core of their identity.

Chapter 1 maps the historical context of the emerging Russian baptistic movement. Numerous economic and social reforms initiated by the Emperor Alexander II, the spiritual crisis that broke out in the Orthodox Church, and then spread throughout the wider society, and the publishing of the Bible in the contemporary Russian language, which was made available to a great number of people – all of these factors have contributed to the appearance of the baptistic groups in the Russian Empire, which initially could be seen as a reformation movement within the Orthodox Church. Using the example of the early peasant Stundist communities, I have argued that, despite the fact that these groups were disjointed and somewhat chaotic in structure and teaching, they shared one major characteristic feature – communal preaching in a form of simplistic literal reading of the Bible with its immediate application to the lives of the members of these communities. Suspicion and rejection that these evangelistic groups experienced from the Orthodox clergy were among the major factors that have

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[2] V. Popov, "Otechestvenniaia Shkola Propovedi…"

[3] Harris, "Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Preaching," (1996).

eventually caused their break-away from the Orthodox Church, leading to the formation of new denominations. Thus, without rejecting the important contribution of various European evangelicals (such as German settlers in the South of the Russian Empire, various missionaries) on the appearance of the Baptist church in Russia, it is possible to speak about the practice of preaching, in a form of simplistic biblical interpretation, playing a prominent formative role in the appearance and spread of the first baptistic churches in the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century.

Chapter 2 seeks to establish a theological background from which Russian baptistic communities had emerged and begun to grow. Context, a set of unique historical, sociological, political and theological settings, inevitably influences the development of any community of faith. Russian Baptist communities differ significantly from the Baptist churches in Europe, Africa, South or North America. Vast cultural and ecclesial heritage of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has penetrated all aspects of Russian culture, must be taken into consideration in any attempt to gain a deeper understanding of Russian Baptist convictions and practices. Due to the limitations of this work and its focus on preaching in Russian Baptist churches, in my study of the context, I have concentrated on three distinct theological and ecclesial elements of the Orthodox theology and practice. These are theosis (or deification), sobornost (or social conformity) and the concept of the Charismatic (or anti-rhetoric) preaching.

Understanding these concepts helps to shed light on the existing reverent attitude to the Church that Russian Baptists have, as well as their unwillingness to be involved in any kind of critical analysis or evaluation of either the practices of the Church or its leadership, instead, emphasising the need to have a right heart, mind, and spirit, when participating in a worship service. The ideas of the charismatic preaching, which dominated Orthodox 'pulpits' in the second half of the 19th century, bring forward a very specific understanding of preaching – a sacramental in character act of transmitting God's Words, but, more importantly, an almost mystical channel of God's grace. As it is shown in the subsequent chapters, such understanding has produced a major imprint on how Baptists in Russia understood and practiced their preaching.

Having briefly addressed the question of the context, in which the first baptistic communities in Russia appeared and grew, Chapters 3 and 4 seek to trace the development of their preaching from their formative years (from the second half of

the 19th century) until the collapse of the Soviet ideology and a beginning of the new era in the history of Russian (and later post-Soviet) Baptists, with the official opening of Odessa Theological Seminary in 1989. In these chapters, I have argued that throughout history, both the baptistic understanding of preaching and its practical implications underwent substantial changes, due to the shifting political environment that the Church existed within. The formative period in the history of the baptistic movement is marked by preaching as simplistic retelling of the biblical story with ethical application to the lives of the listeners. The absence of strict doctrinal constraints allowed the fast growth of the movement, when the government allowed more freedom to the dissenters (with the law of 1905).

Eventually, such freedom in the use of the Scripture started to cause controversies and problems within the movement, thus highlighting the need of greater theological coherence among the diverse congregations of Baptists and Evangelical Christians. The leadership of the two existing unions attempted to tackle these problems by organising various theological training opportunities for the pastors and missionaries, and by developing extensive publishing activities. Magazines and newspapers enabled tens of thousands of people across the vast territory of the Russian Empire to access theological essays and sermons, thus providing educational materials and achieving greater unity in the local churches. At this stage, preaching was seen as an activity, where the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit was complemented by the knowledge and preparations of the preacher. Education and personal growth was seen as an important part of preaching ministry.

The period of persecutions, which started soon after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, marked another shift in how preaching, as well as all the other ministries of local churches, was practiced. The impossibility to carry out any educational activities, and the strictly enforced ban on social and youth work, allowed Christians to successfully rival aggressive Soviet domination only in such areas as spirituality and personal moral living. All of this has inevitably impacted preaching. The only available way to learn how to preach was through prayer and personal reflection on the Bible. The main preparation for the preaching event was through prayer. The success of the preaching ministry was measured by the preacher's integrity and spiritual maturity. Eventually, such attitudes led to a

situation where preachers were seen as special men of God, and their pulpit ministry was seen as a sign of God's calling and anointing.

Chapter 5 focuses on the post-Soviet period in the history of Russian Baptists. I briefly address topics, related to the context of worship, such as the liturgy, sacred space (the house of prayer) and participants. However, the main goal of this section is to continue developing the themes of a preacher's spirituality, authority, and the listeners' perception of the act of preaching. The main argument in this chapter is that the practice of proclamation plays a much greater role in churches than that of an educational or an inspirational instrument. Culturally inherent perception of the church leadership as 'holy people, unable to err,' leads to the formation of a separate class of people within the presumably non-hierarchical structure of the Baptist communities in Russia. "Sluzhiteli," a kind of "Christian elite," receive their authority through, first of all, the preaching office. Furthermore, the existing pattern of uncritical perception of the sermons, supported and encouraged by many preachers, opens the doors to various abuses of power in churches, due to the absence of "educated listeners," lay members, able to hold preachers (and the wider church leadership) accountable. Thus, the neglect of issues of power and authority, which the preaching office attributes to its practitioners, affects the development of the contemporary Baptist congregations.

Chapter 6 marks the beginning of a new section, passing from the description and analysis of the development of preaching to such themes as baptistic identity, and preaching as a social practice. Having claimed, in the previous chapter, that proclamation in Russian Baptist churches plays a greater role than a tool that only belongs to the areas of spirituality and rhetoric, the argument in Chapter 6 is that preaching must be understood as a powerful practice, to enable churches to address its constructive, as well as destructive potentials. However, before I introduce the concept of social practices, it is necessary to set the boundaries, to define the constants that constitute baptistic identity, something that preaching is primarily concerned with (being perceived as the most important instrument for shaping and preserving Russian Baptist congregations).

Following the review of a number of different approaches to defining Baptist identity, I have employed the concept of the *baptist vision*, as developed by James McClendon, as the most helpful for the purposes of my research. The vision is

understood as a particular hermeneutical principle, a reading strategy, when the church sees itself as an inseparable part of the biblical story, whilst at the same time being examined and transformed by it. Since such approach to the *baptistic identity* highlights the crucial role of the Bible, the important question that has to be addressed is how this book is read by the believing community. This introduces the focus of Chapter 7, which is social practices, and, in particular, the practices of reading the Bible.

I approach the notion of practices following MacIntyre's philosophical views. He sees social practices as something inherently positive. Participation in practices leads to the discovery of goods internal, practices result in virtues. With the help of the concept of powers and principalities, McClendon introduces an important corrective. He argues that every practice has a potential to rebel or fall. Consequently, they should be considered as powerful practices, thus emphasising their constructive potential as well as destructive force. Therefore, I have argued that preaching must be understood as a powerful practice, since it may result in virtues as well as in vices. Using the history of Russian Baptist communities it can be seen, how the understanding of preaching changed from a communal practice, open to all the members of the early baptistic groups, to a power attribute, available to a specially selected group of people, often alienating lay Christians from the involvement in in-depth Bible study and reflection. Considering that the *baptist vision*, as formulated by McClendon, is a form of communal hermeneutics, preaching, in its contemporary form, can be seen as possessing powers, deforming the identity of Russian Baptist communities.

The important question that this discussion has led to, is the question of safe-guarding against potential weaknesses and imperfections of the practice of proclamation, particularly, considering its central place in the worship of Russian Baptist communities. Such a safe-guarding strategy must be found in the practice of Bible reading, since this practice contains the necessary correctives to other vulnerable practices of the believing community, including the practice of Bible reading itself. The whole of Chapter 8, therefore, becomes a case for communal hermeneutics. I have argued that in order to nullify the destructive potential of preaching, it must be practiced within a wider cluster of practices of reading the Bible, which includes the need for the whole Christian fellowship to be involved in the process of communal hermeneutics, developing into a community of interpreters, which involves both formal

and church-based educational opportunities for its members similar in spirit to the baptistic experiments at the beginning of the 20th century, considered in Chapter 3.

Since Baptists perceive the Bible to be the Holy Scripture, rather than an ordinary ancient text, they employ reading strategies which might be different from the hermeneutical tools used in academic study. The church, first of all, seeks literal and spiritual senses in the biblical text, through its typological reading. Their safeguarding strategy against potential misinterpretations, is reading the Scripture in a community of fellow Christians, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The conclusions of this chapter, however, must not be seen as a prescriptive approach to biblical interpretation in Baptist churches. Rather, it is a theological justification for an argument that reading the Bible in the community, understood and practiced within a wider cluster of practices, and preaching as one of them, serves as a sufficient safeguarding strategy against the destructive potential of various powerful practices, including the practice of proclamation.

The final chapter aims to answer the question – what kind of preaching is required, considering the previous discussion of the powerful practices, and the call for the Church to rediscover the communal aspect in biblical interpretation guided by their baptistic vision. I have argued that an important lesson might be drawn from the existing Russian Baptist phenomenon of multiple preaching in a worship service. However, instead of focusing on at its present form, I believe it is necessary to look into the formative years of the movement, which could be seen as a successful experiment in communal hermeneutics, with preaching being the formative force behind the emergence of a particular ecclesial identity, despite the resistance of the surrounding dominant religious culture and political establishment.

However, this thesis was not meant to offer a homiletical method that could be immediately employed by the local churches in Russia. If anything, this is a call to re-think and re-evaluate the existing emphasis on preaching as *the practice,* responsible for the transition of the biblical narrative into the lives of the listeners. The rediscovery of the communal aspect of biblical interpretation implies significant shifts in the churches' understanding (and existing forms) of leadership and authority, as well as various other theological convictions (for example, the role and place of the Holy Spirit in biblical hermeneutics). Therefore, practical implications of this study must, first of

all, be seen in the University, theological educational institutions, which are involved in the preparation and training of future preachers and pastors, but also aim to be places of the furthering of theological thought.

Thus, I have concluded my study with an overview of the curriculums of two major theological schools, being particularly interested in how the subject of preaching is introduced. I have highlighted that students are being taught the discipline of homiletics, with the main emphasis on biblical exegesis and rhetoric, based primarily on materials, developed by authors from an Anglo-American context, therefore lacking or neglecting the understanding of the ecclesial tradition they are coming from (or planning to minister to), which inevitably contributes to the still un-bridged chasm between the Church and the University.

My concluding recommendation was for the schools to introduce deeper studies of the Baptist identity, as well as perform a shift in their approach to the theological task, which needs to be seen as a discovery, an interpretation, and the potential correction of the convictions of the church. I believe these amendments would result in a deeper understanding, and therefore, in a greater appreciation by the academic institutions of the existing convictions and practices of local churches, and, hence, make further study and development (of both the Church and the University) possible.

To conclude, I can say that this thesis was the very first attempt to engage in a discussion about the current state and the future of the practice of preaching through the lens of the concept of Baptist identity, thus setting a platform for further reflection and development of the disciplines of homiletics and hermeneutics amongst Russian Baptists. Throughout my study I outlined several possible directions for further studies.

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Appendix 1

Preaching ministry in the Church

Personal information

Gender: male female

Age: under 30 30-50 over 50

Church membership: i) Yes, more than 3 years ii) Yes, less than 3 years iii) Yes, less than 1 year

iv) No, I am a regular visitor v) No, I am a newcomer

Do you preach? yes no

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1. What is preaching? _____

2. Who should be allowed to preach in church? _____

3. Could women preach? Please, explain your response. _____

4. Do you like listening to sermons? _____

5. Do churches need preaching? _____

6. Why preaching is needed? _____

7. Do you remember the most recent sermon?

   - Scripture passages used: _____

   - Main ideas of the sermon: _____

8. What were you thinking about after you had listened to the most recent sermon? _____

9. What do you think about the preachers from your church? _____

10. Are you certain that everything you hear from the pulpit is the truth? _____

11. Do you agree with everything you hear from the pulpit? _____

12. Can you say that a sermon has changed you? Is yes, then how? _____

13. Do you discuss sermons with your friends? _____

14. Do you reflect upon the sermon after the service? _____

15. What sermon themes would be of particular interest for you? _____

16. If you disagree with the preacher, what would you do about it? _____

17. Have you felt that you wasted your time having listened to a sermon? How can you explain it?

16. Can a sermon be bad? Please, explain your response. _____

17. Do you hear bad sermons in your church? Never Sometimes Often

18. What kind of sermons do you prefer? _____

19. What do you dislike in preaching? _____

20. Is there any theme you would like to hear a sermon on, but it never happens?_____

21. What do you feel if a preacher speaks "too long"? _____

22. Can one worship service have too many sermons? _____

23. What is the best number of sermons for one service? _____

24. Are preachers responsible for attracting the attention of the audience? _____

25. What is the listeners' responsibility in preaching? _____

26. (for preachers) Do listeners influence your sermons? In what way? _____

27. (for preachers only) Should you make your preaching interesting? _____

27a. What do you do for it? _____

28. (for listeners) Does the personality of a preacher affects the way you listen to him? _____